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OLD ECLIPSE, TRUMP CARD OF ARIZONA; Or, LITTLE SNAP SHOT'S HORSE HUNT.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "PLUCKY PHIL," "ARKANSAW," "BILL BRAVO," "CAPTAIN APOLLO," "CAPTAIN BULLET," "OLD FROSTY," ETC., ETC.



THE GIRL SPRUNG OUT ON THE TRAIL AND BEGAN TO POUR THE CONTENTS OF HER RIFLE INTO THE RANKS OF THE RED SCOURGE.

Old Eclipse,

Trump Card of Arizona;

OR,

Little Snap Shot's Horse Hunt.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "BILL BRAVO" "OLD WINCH," "CAPTAIN APOLLO," "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "DYNAMITE DAN," "MOUNTAIN DETECTIVE," "TORNADO TOM," "PLUCKY PHIL," "CAPTAIN BULLET," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MOUNTAIN MYSTERY.

"THEY'RE hyer to-day an' gone to-morrow, dod-rot the'r skins! I wish the hull Apache nation war one man, an' thet I hed the dead drop on him!"

"But thet time will never come, Eclipse."

"I know it, an' thet's what riles me. Oh, I feel like turnin' wild-cat an' eatin' Injun babes. I do, fer a fact. An Injun is the meanest thing thet crawls, an' them dirty Apaches—I must stop or I shall explode!"

The angry and emphatic speaker was one of a band of twelve men, who, well mounted on good Pampas horses, were threading a trail that meandered among the Mongolian mountains.

A balmy September day had just departed, and the shadows of night lay on peak and pine.

The men were bronzed fellows, roughly dressed, but well armed with long-range repeating rifles and formidable revolvers.

Their horses appeared somewhat jaded, for, to be explicit as we go along, they had chased a band of Apaches—the red thieves of the Southern border—the greater part of the day just gone by, and were returning unsuccessful and in no good humor to camp.

In another hour they would reach camp, where, around several fires, they could curse the Indians to their hearts' content.

The man called Eclipse, and who had just given vent to his feelings in language already recorded, was the recognized leader of the party, a large man, whose gray hair and sixty years had not deprived his eyes of the luster they knew in bygone days.

He was a veritable borderer, and Old Eclipse, as he was called, was known everywhere as miner, Indian-fighter and desperado.

The men who rode behind him were fit companions for a leader of his kind.

"I'd like to see the camp them red-skins'd let alone ten minutes ef they got a chance to disturb it," Old Eclipse suddenly exclaimed after a few minutes' silence. "They war created jes' to carry on their deviltry among people who want to do half right. To perdition with 'em! I feel mad enough to eat the hull tribe, blankets an' all, though I know the dish'd turn a cata-mountain's stomach."

Nobody replied to this new outburst of wrath.

Old Eclipse was famous for relieving his pent-up feelings frequently in this manner, and his companions knew that a reply would but send him galloping on through the entire vocabulary of invective and rage.

The mountain trail was by no means a pleasant road. It was so rough that the horses were compelled to walk, much to their joy no doubt, and the men let the reins drop idly from their hands.

"Don't I wish I was an 'arthquake?" broke forth Eclipse again. "I don't mean a one-hoss affair, but a reg'lar double-jointed, hifalutin' 'arthquake."

"That's a queer idee, Eclipse," said one of the men. "You'd make a good size'l 'arthquake, big enough to bu'st up an Arizona county."

"I'd do more than thet, Thunder Sam," cried Eclipse. "Ef I war an 'arthquake I'd go into Apache-land an' commence business on a grand scale. Thar wouldn't be a red-skin in the kentry when I got ready to retire. I'd jes' open under the thievin' tribe an' take it all in at a gulp. Why can't a man be what he wants to be when he's real mad? I'd give all I've got in this vale of tears to be a first class healthy 'arthquake in Injundom fer three minutes, hang me ef I wouldn't!" And the old miner's fist descended heavily against the neck of his jaded beast.

Several of the men looked at one another and exchanged grins; but no one except Thunder Sam deigned to reply.

He began to assure the irate old miner that

the day of vengeance was not far distant; but Old Eclipse would not be appeased.

"Now! now!" he flashed. "I don't want to wait another day. I want to be an 'arthquake, er a killin' thunderbolt right away. Don't talk to me! I don't see what a man's good fer ef he can't be an 'arthquake when it suits him."

The last word had hardly left Old Eclipse's lips ere a startling cry rung out on the warm night air.

"Thar ar' twelve men in this gang! Who's the extra pard?"

In an instant every rein was drawn, and more than one dark hand snatched a revolver from a buckskin belt.

The mountain roughs whirled upon a certain individual who sat almost bolt upright in one of the saddles. In their eagerness to obtain a good view of his face they leaned forward holding their breath and keeping their fingers at the triggers of their weapons.

All at once a wild exclamation was heard.

"Great Jebosaphat! the pard ar' dead!"

The men recoiled.

"I see! Look! Thar's a ten-inch bowie in his heart!" cried Old Eclipse, pointing out the stranger whose terrible condition the whole band had discovered by this time. "I wonder when he jined us?"

Of course no one could answer this question.

Somewhere along the trail the dead man had joined the mountain men, but when and where no one knew.

That he was a borderer like those whom he had joined was shown by a brief inspection, but Old Eclipse and his companions had never seen him before.

The dead hands clutched the reins and seemed to steady him in the saddle; his body was rigid—it had long been so—and his swarthy skin was perfectly cold.

Of course the stare of the dead was in the glassy gray eyes that surmounted the bronze cheeks. The corpse was fully armed; two silver-mounted revolvers and a huge bowie were in his belt.

Old Eclipse's outstretched hand called the attention of all to the hilt of a dirk that touched the dead man's left breast.

Its position told every man that the blade was deeply imbedded in a human heart!

The presence of that mounted corpse in their midst made the mountaineers shudder.

Is it a wonder that they drew back and left him comparatively alone?

"I'm goin' to find the man thet did thet!" exclaimed Old Eclipse. "It's the meanest trick I ever heard of—it beats the Apaches! I've roughed it in the Mongolian kentry fer twenty years, an' I never sot eyes on thet man afore. Woe to the band thet drove thet bowie home ef Old Eclipse finds it!"

"It might be Spanish Jack's work," suggested Thunder Sam.

"Woe to Spanish Jack, then!"

The next moment Old Eclipse urged his horse toward the dead man, and his companions saw him lean forward and put his hand on the cold shoulder.

"I wish you could open them lips, stranger," the old miner said looking into the lusterless eyes. "I'd give my last ounce of dust ef you could say who handled thet big heart-pick, last, but I'll find 'im jes' the same! I'm worse than a family ov catamounts when I'm riled. I'm equal to a single bar'led 'arthquake. Woe to the man who killed you, pard! Thunder Sam, byer, says it might have been Spanish Jack. I don't keer who it war! I'm his enemy from this minute. I'm Old Eclipse what never lost his man if I do say it myself."

The old miner's hand left the dead man's shoulder; he straightened in the saddle.

"Bury thet man!" he cried, turning to his comrades. "Plant him decently as you would a pard. I'm goin' back!"

At the same moment Old Eclipse gathered up the reins and turned his animal's head toward that part of the trail over which they had just ridden.

"Ain't you goin' to Redeye first?" queried Thunder Sam.

"No—not till I've found the owner of the bowie-knife!" was the significant answer.

"If you'll wait till after the plantin', Eclipse, you shall not go alone."

"I never waited fer company in all my life! Plant that man decently, I say, an' go on to Redeye. Ef O'd Eclipse never comes back, you'll know thet the devil what driv that bowie home came out on top. Take keer ov Blossom an' the mountain shanty, fer thar may be times when I can't. You know what I've always said—'Woe to the man, red er white, what enters

that cabin without Old Eclipse's consent.' My word shall be made good! Spanish Jack, eh? Then I can't meet the Arizona Tiger too soon. I'm off fer his lair, ef he's the varmint."

Old Eclipse threw a parting glance at the dead man, and before a hand could detain him, he struck his horse savagely with the spurs and was off like a rocket.

"Bury the strange pard, boys. Old Eclipse sha'n't go alone!" cried Thunder Sam.

"He stall, fer thet's the way he wants to go!" was the quick response of several mountaineers, and Thunder Sam found himself held captive by his comrades. "We all go back to Redeye, Thunder. Let Eclipse go alone an' see how his hunt pans out. We can't fool with a dead man's affairs when the Injuns threaten the old camp."

"I'll stay, boys."

Thunder Sam was thus restrained from following his leader, though his eyes wandered anxiously down the trail Old Eclipse had taken.

Meanwhile the eagle-eyed miner was making his steed's shoes draw fire from the stones that cropped out here and there along the trail.

His eyes fairly flashed, and more than once a certain name dropped from his tongue.

"Spanish Jack! — Spanish Jack, eh? I'd rather be Old Eclipse now than the 'arthquake I wanted to be awhile ago. I'm worse than a catamount, if I am sixty. I've got muscle an' vim, if I am Old Eclipse!"

On, on he went.

The golden lights above went glimmering down the trails of the sky.

Suddenly the old avenger drew rein. He had left the cliff-walled trail, and stood on a beautiful little plateau with the whole expanse of the heavens above his head.

"Watch over Blossom, you golden stars!" he suddenly exclaimed, raising his hand toward the sky. "She's dearer to Old Eclipse than the blood in his veins. Tell me by some sign when danger threatens her, an' I'll ride to her if I hev to dash through fire! I'm a dead man's avenger—a corpse's pard. Thar's suthin' funny in thet, Eclipse."

And with a coarse laugh that sounded weirdly in that place, Old Eclipse used the spurs again and galloped on once more.

"Spanish Jack they call you, Tiger, but I'm goin' to examine yer bowie's sheath jes' the same!" he muttered.

He seemed to know where to find the man called Spanish Jack—or the Tiger of Arizona, as he was termed—for he went on and on like a man who kept his destination constantly in his mind.

Such riding would certainly take him to his enemy.

CHAPTER II.

SNAP SHOT, THE HORSE-HUNTER.

AT the foot of one of the lofty mountain walls that fringed the trail at the spot where the mysterious dead man was discovered to be one of the Redeye band, a strange funeral service was held while Old Eclipse was urging his horse on.

The dead was buried by the rough hands of the miners who, after the brief ceremony, remounted their horses and resumed their journey.

"You fellers go on to Redeye," suddenly ordered Thunder Sam, as he stopped his steed at the side of the trail and motioned his companions to keep straight ahead. "I'll rejoin you in camp afore mornin'. Somebody's got to look arter Blossom while Eclipse's away, an' we hevn't seen the mountain daisy fer four-an'-twenty hours."

From the spot where Thunder Sam had halted ran a narrow trail, which soon lost itself at his right; and as none of his companions objected to his intention of visiting the person called Blossom, the miner turned aside and left them to move on to camp.

A strange, unnatural eagerness filled Thunder Sam's eyes as he moved down the new trail, his figure and that of his horse hardly discernible among the thick shadows of night.

"Blossom's a beauty an' no mistake," he said to himself. "Old Eclipse b'lieves that no feller will ever pick her up whar she is, but I'm ov a different opinion. You can't hide gals like Blossom in the mountains ferever. Eclipse thinks that she'll always live single fer him. I b'lieve he'd kill the man er boy what offered to make love to his Mor-gallon daisy. I've heard 'im say almost ez much. I wouder whether he'd tackle me ef I tried it?"

And a low laugh rippled over Thunder Sam's bearded lips.

The bronzed rough held his way for several

miles by the winding trail, when he drew rein in front of a small hut, which only keen eyes like his could see at that hour.

"I'm hyer, an' everything's ez still ez death," he said, leaning forward and inspecting the structure. "Blossom doesn't look fer a visitor to-night, much less does she dream that Thunder Sam would give his very eyes to call her wife."

How the orbs of the speaker glistened while he spoke, and how eager he was to throw himself from his horse and rush into the hut!

"It's almost a shame to disturb Old Eclipse's pet, but I'm hyer to see her, an' by Thunder! I'm not goin' to Redeye without gittin' a glimpse ov the posey. Bizness is bizness, Thunder; so git to work an' play yer hand."

Thunder Sam urged his horse up to the door, and leaned toward the hut for the purpose of rapping.

"Hyer goes!" he said, but before his knuckles could touch the unplanned portal a number of yells, wild enough to startle the bravest Arizonian, struck his ears.

Thunder Sam straightened instantly in his saddle.

"Shades ov Santa Anna? what does that mean?" he ejaculated. "Injuns, by heavens! The dirty Apaches hev come back!"

Hard upon the yells rung out, distinct and clear, four shots in rapid succession, fired undoubtedly from one weapon.

The miner drew his revolvers and listened.

"I got hyer jes' in time," he muttered. "It war fortunate that I left the boys when I did. The Injins hev tackled somebody up the mountain. Thar they go ag'in! That last yell war a death one!"

Certain sounds now told Thunder Sam that somebody was nearing the cabin on a swift horse, and that a number of Indians were in pursuit.

He drew back from the hut to the opposite side of the trail, where, with a revolver in each hand, he waited for the red-skins.

"Hyer they come, hunters and hunted! I'll let the quarry go by, an' then, by Jehosaphat! I'll carry mournin' to more than one cursed Apache wigwan!"

Thunder Sam spoke with teeth hard-set and steel-glittering eyes.

All at once several arrows cut the darkness as they whizzed past his face, and then a horse and his rider appeared on the scene.

At that moment, to the rough's amazement the door of the hut flew open and, despite the scanty starlight, Thunder Sam saw the beautiful girl who appeared on the threshold with an elegant repeating-rifle in her hands.

"Blossom herself!" fell from the miner's lips. "Great Cæsar! down goes the white man! Them Injun arrows did the work."

A horse and its boy rider had fallen in front of the cabin door, and in another moment the red-skins would be upon the scene.

"Not while I'm hyer, you red niggers!" grated Thunder Sam, but before he could place himself and horse between the stricken lad and the Apaches the girl sprung out on the trail and began to pour the contents of her rifle into the ranks of the red scourges.

Met thus unexpectedly when they were about to finish the chase, the Indians recoiled with exclamations of surprise and savage horror.

Every bullet fired by the mountain girl seemed to prove effective, for the half-naked butchers fell from their horses, and when Thunder Sam reached her side, the band was in full retreat.

"This is forbidden ground!" exclaimed the girl. "Woe to an Apache who sets foot on it. Go back to your hunting-grounds and plunder ranches, but keep aloof from this place, on pain of death!"

"Thet's bizness, Blossom," said Thunder Sam, at the sound of whose voice the young girl quickly turned, unaware until that moment of his presence.

"What! you here?" she demanded, in surprise.

"I kinder reckon so," was the response, accompanied by a grin which did not enhance Sam's good looks. "You kin shoot like old Jack Hays, Blossom."

"I was not shooting for myself, but for the person those savages were chasing," said the girl. "He fell with his horse at the door of the cabin. Let us go back and see if he's dead."

"I hope he is, by heavens, I do!" muttered Thunder Sam, under his breath, as he turned back with the eager and anxious girl. "The only squint I got ov him told me he war a youngster, an' thet kind ov a chicken is the last thing I want to see hyer to-night."

Without noticing whether Sam was following her, the young girl moved rapidly toward the hut, while he, leading his horse, for he had dismounted, was at her heels.

"Alive! by Jupiter! The red-skins didn't finish him, after all!" said Thunder Sam, seeing the person who had just risen from under a horse still struggling against death, on the ground. "He's a boy—a good-lookin' feller, an' jes' the kind ov chap Old Eclipse doesn't want hyer. I'd do the old man a service by—"

The Arizona rough cut his own sentence short, for, seeing Blossom, the youth had sprung forward and the young people stood face to face for the first time.

Under his breath Sam cursed the young man, and if his looks had been arrows the stranger would have been pierced through and through.

"I owe you a life, for your rifle has preserved mine," said the youth, addressing the girl.

"Thet's more than mine would hev done!" hissed Thunder Sam. "It looks as ef I've got to play a lone hand in a new game, curse yer handsome pictur, boy!"

"I did only my duty," replied the girl in answer to the youth's words. "I am glad that I have been of service to you. Your horse—"

"He got the arrows and not his master," was the interruption. "He was a faithful animal, the companion of the one whose loss has brought me to this part of the country. My words make me tell my story," he went on, smiling, before Blossom could respond.

"I am quite willing to listen, but in the first place let me introduce to you my friend, Mr. Reese."

"Thunder Sam! No mistering fer me, Blossom!" growled the bronzed bravo, as he came sullenly forward, his eyes, full of ill-humor, fixed on the youth.

"Thunder Sam, it is?" smiled the girl, glancing at the youth. "And you are—?"

"Since nick names are in vogue in this country, you can call me Snap Shot."

"Snap Shot, eh? Little Snap Shot, I should say," remarked Sam, somewhat contemptuously. "Now that we've got acquainted, but not ez well ez we may be in the future, you kin go on with yer story."

Snap Shot eyed the muscular rough from head to foot before he proceeded, then catching a soft and eager glance from Blossom, he resumed:

"I'm from the San Carlos country, and I'm on the hunt of a band of Apaches who stampeded and ran off a herd of the best horses that ever cropped Arizona grass. There were just fifty horses in the herd, but I'm willing to lose forty-nine if I can recover the fiftieth, a blooded Maverick, as white as snow and as swift as a bullet."

"A hoss what is a hoss!" ejaculated Thunder Sam. "And you hope to recover him?"

"I do and I will. For White Rocket, that one horse, I am in this part of the territory, and I shall not go back to the ranch without my property and an Indian scalp for each horse the marauding thieves have captured or killed in this last plunder raid."

"Jewiliky! what a contrast!" cried the bronzed Hercules. "Look hyer, youngster. The combined forces ov Redeye wouldn't undertake that job. You don't know the Injins—"

"I've known them from childhood," interrupted Snap Shot. "I have taken an oath to recover my horse, and to pay Red Heart and his band for their dirty work. Yes, Thunder Sam, I know the red-skins pretty well. I have no massacres to avenge. I want my horse and a few scalps, that is all."

"All?" echoed Sam. "It's a blamed sight more than you'll get, Snap Shot. What do you say, Blossom?"

"I must say that your mission is a most dangerous one," answered the girl, addressing the young horse-hunter. "You have had a taste of the danger to-night, I should say."

"Yes. The Indians came upon me unexpectedly, and I had to gallop for it; but it will be their turn now to run."

"I hope it will; but were I you, I would go back to the ranch, and—"

"And let Red Heart ride White Rocket on his future forays! Sooner than go back without my horse, I'd turn my body over to the vultures!"

"You're bound to give the birds a breakfast, then."

Snap Shot wheeled upon Thunder Sam, who had spoken. His dark eyes fairly flashed.

"I am my own master!" he exclaimed. "I ask the assistance of no one. I started out alone to find White Rocket, and find him I will, by my own efforts. I'm no novice in horse-

hunting. I have used the lasso ten thousand times, and when it comes to shooting, I'm proud to say I can hold my own with anybody. That horse has got to be recovered, and the stampeder's punished, and Little Snap Shot—Little Snap Shot as you call him—is equal to the task!"

"I hope he is, by Jupiter, I do!" returned the man from Redeye, choking down the madness that made him clinch his hands. "Go an' hunt that hoss, but mind I tell you that you've undertaken the biggest contract an Arizonian ever had on his hands. I happen to know suthin' about Red Heart and the kind ov devils he leads; but ar' you sure that when you find yer boss you'll find that Injun on his back?"

The horse-hunter started, and for a moment gave Thunder Sam a searching look.

"I'm sure of one thing, and that is that whoever I find astride of White Rocket shall give him up. I care not who he is!"

"Ov course, ov course Thar's a feller in Arizona called Spanish Jack. I think I saw a sample of his work to-night."

"I've heard of the yellow tiger. I can almost say that I know him," answered Snap Shot. "You would intimate that I might find White Rocket in his possession? I am willing it should be so, though I'd rather find Red Heart on his back. Wherever my horse-trail leads, there I hunt. Understand that, Thunder Sam."

Snap Shot turned to the girl as he concluded:

"My horse is dead," he said, having glanced at the animal who no longer struggled in front of the mountain cabin. "I will strip him of saddle and bridle, which may be of use to me in the future, and give him a grave near your home if you do not object."

"I shall be proud to live near the grave of the noble animal that bore you in safety to my humble home," was the prompt reply, and as Snap Shot moved toward the dead horse, Blossom walked toward the open door.

"Curse his pictur! The hull jig is up now," grated Thunder Sam, as his eyes followed Snap Shot with many an eager flash. "Old Eclipse wouldn't stand it ef he war hyer, an' why should I?"

By this time the young horse-hunter had reached his arrow-slain steed, and was loosening the saddle.

Sam threw a hasty glance at the cabin door, and seeing that Blossom had disappeared within, strode swiftly forward.

In his right hand was a huge bowie, whose ten-inch blade gleamed in the light of the stars.

"I'll end his hoss-hunt hyer!" literally hissed the jealous desperado. "The old ranch, wharever it is, shall never see Snap Shot ag'in, as sure as my name is Sam Reese!"

The horse-hunter did no perceive his danger, but there was one who did.

A figure glided noiselessly from the cabin, and a touch on Thunder Sam's arm made him turn.

"Put up your knife, or there'll be one man less in Redeye to-morrow!" spoke a low but resolute voice, in his very ear.

No wonder Thunder Sam recoiled.
He was looking down the barrel of a revolver

CHAPTER III.

THE TIGER SHOWS HIS TEETH.

BRAVE and reckless as he was, Thunder Sam did not attempt to move again upon Snap Shot, or to speak, and the young horse-hunter did not know what was taking place.

"Go back to Redeye alive, or remain here dead," continued the girl. "You have your choice, Thunder Sam. You are Eclipse's friend, and I do not want to see one hair of your head blood-stained, but you shall not take the life of yon boy. Put up your knife and retrace your steps!"

Thunder Sam allowed his eyes to wander to the youth busy removing the saddle from the dead horse.

"I'll go, Blossom, but not fer that young hoss-hunter's sake," he said in equally low tones. "What would Old Eclipse say ef he could see that chap hyer? He came to this place without the old man's consent."

"I know that; but the Indians forced him this way," was Blossom's quick reply. "I will answer to Eclipse for all that has occurred."

A moment later Thunder Sam, baffled, but with his evil eyes glaring like a tiger's, turned toward his horse.

Standing in the trail, watching him while her right hand still clutched the revolver, was Old Eclipse's beautiful protegee.

"A bad man for a thousand," rippled over her lips as her eyes followed the retreating figure. "This encounter is the beginning of a

tragedy of some kind. Keep your distance from Mountain Lodge, Thunder Sam. From this hour you are no friend of mine; there was murder in your heart to-night, and the devil danced in your eyes."

Blossom went toward Snap Shot, whom she watched for a short time without making her presence known.

"Where's your friend, Thunder Sam?" asked the young horse-hunter, seeing the girl alone.

"He has gone," was the answer.

"Not after the Indians?"

"I think not."

"Is your friend an Indian-fighter?"

"He has met them on different occasions."

"He is not the best Indian-fighter in this part of the country, then?"

"No, sir; he is not!"

"Who is?"

"Old Eclipse."

Blossom's eyes glowed with pride as she uttered the name, and Snap Shot seemed to notice the feeling betrayed.

"He is your friend?" he asked.

"The best friend I have," was the response. "If you hunt your horse through these parts you may meet Eclipse. He has been as kind as a father to me ever since the day he found me, a babe, lying under a wagon on the Colorado emigrant trail. That was long ago. All my people were killed in the massacre that took place the day Old Eclipse came along and found me. By some miracle I escaped the hatchets of the red-skins, and when I was found I was asleep among some flowers. That's why I was called Blossom. Eclipse never discovered my true name, and I guess it's lost forever."

Snap Shot listened entranced to the sweet voice in which was told the story of the Indian butchery and the finding of the little waif—now the beautiful creature who stood before him.

"When I run across Eclipse I will thank him for finding you," he said. "What manner of man is he?"

"A tall, dark-faced person, with hair long and fast growing gray. He carries a scar across his left cheek, the work of an Apache arrow."

"I will know him," exclaimed Snap Shot, and then, as if suddenly thinking of another matter, he asked: "Isn't there a place near here called Redeye?"

"There is. It is a mining-camp off to the north, though the men don't do much mining now. Old Eclipse is there when he is not here with me, and the place is Thunder Sam's home."

"I'm not going there, because my horse-hunt doesn't lead in that direction," announced the youth. "I am pretty certain that White Rocket is somewhere in this neighborhood, and in Red Heart's hands, too. How I long to ride the horse once more, and how my hand itches to press the trigger in front of the red stampeder!"

"I doubt it not," answered the girl. "As I have already said, I wish you success; but let me give you a bit of advice."

She paused a moment, and looking into her face, he said: "Go on."

"Steer clear of the man who has just gone off."

"Thunder Sam?"

"Yes, for though one of my foster-father's pards, he is bad medicine."

"I must have crossed his path in some way to-night, though I am sure I never met him before. I will watch him if he needs watching. Does my horse-hunt concern him?"

"I think not."

"Anyway, let him keep his fingers out of my affairs. The trail I am on belongs exclusively to me. If anybody interferes, he will discover that I can hunt men as well as horses. Hark!"

The sound that had startled Snap Shot had also reached Blossom's ears—a horse was approaching the cabin.

"It may be Eclipse, and he must not see you here!" cried the girl, grasping the youth's arm.

"Why not?"

"I cannot tell you now. Quick! leave me alone!"

"But my dead horse?"

"I will fix that with him; only go! One of these days we may meet again, then—Heavens! it is too late. He is here!"

At that moment a horse halted before the youthful pair, and they were greeted by an exclamation of astonishment.

"It is not Eclipse!" exclaimed Blossom, starting back.

"It is Spanish Jack!" cried the boy.

"Ay, Spanish Jack it is, my young turtle-doves," was the quick response. "By Jove! you're a daisy pair! This must be Old Eclipse's

mountain bird," and he fixed his eyes on Blossom's face.

The girl and her companion could but stare at the speaker.

As they could see, by the light of the stars, he was a veritable forest Apollo, both in face and figure.

A broad-brimmed sombrero, with a wide band, the ends of which were fringed, sat jauntily on his head. He wore a gold-laced Mexicanish jacket, which was open in front, revealing a rich shirt, brodered with silver braid. His leggings were loose-fitting, slashed at the bottom, and fringed on the outside from the knees down. They almost hid the feet thrust into the heavy Mexican stirrups.

Spanish Jack displayed conspicuously his weapons, which consisted of two revolvers and the inseparable bowie of the border.

His garments fitted him well; they seemed to set off the handsome face, with its coal-black eyes and raven mustache.

This was the man who was well known up and down the southern border—the yellow-faced dare-devil who rode where he pleased, carrying his life in his hands, and spreading terror over the length and breadth of the well-stocked ranches.

Did he stampede herds?

Was it not said, and firmly believed, that alone and unaided, this Apollo of Arizona could run off the best-guarded horses in the territory—that in less than five hours he could have at his back a gang of men like himself, capable of successfully resisting a hundred Vigilantes?

For six months prior to the date of our romance, the Arizona Tiger's name had hardly been mentioned within the territory. It had been rumored that he had been killed by New Mexican ranchmen: but nobody believed this, for Spanish Jack was too cunning to fall by the hands of a half-Greaser—this was the verdict of the Arizonians.

His sudden appearance, therefore, in front of the hut in the mountains might well startle the pair whom he confronted.

Blossom involuntarily recoiled from the piercing eyes of the swarthy desperado.

"I am Eclipse's ward," she said in response to his last sentence.

"His ward, eh? Caramba! where did he find you? Ah! I know. I recollect that Don Domez some time ago told me over his wine that a certain old mountain miner once found a white baby under a wagon after an Indian massacre. You must be the beauty. Santissima! you're all that Don Domez said you were. Don't know the Don, I guess, my little bird? No? well, he wouldn't recognize you if you were to meet, because he's dead; ha, ha! But, who's this?"

Spanish Jack cut his merriment short to turn upon Snap Shot.

The young horse-hunter straightened up with flashing eyes.

"I am Snap Shot," he answered.

"Ho! ho! The boy that wants to find a certain horse?"

Did the young horse-hunter start?

"Since you seem to have heard of my oath, I say that I am the person."

"Have you struck White Rocket's trail?"

"I will strike it."

"If you can, my pigeon. Miles from here is an Indian camp. It lies in that direction," and Spanish Jack's hand pointed toward the northeast. "In that camp are fifty of the best warriors of the Apache nation. Caramba! you will believe me when I say that Red Heart heads them, on the back of a horse as white as snow."

"White Rocket!" ejaculated the boy.

"Dare you hunt your horse in that red-skin camp?" continued the Tiger. "Dare you traverse the country that lies between you and that spot?"

"Show me the trail and let my future actions answer you."

"Follow me if you mean to keep your oath."

With his eyes fixed on Snap Shot, Spanish Jack wheeled his steed.

The horse-hunter glanced at Blossom and hesitated.

"Can you show me the trail?" he demanded.

"Did you ever hear Spanish Jack lie?"

"No."

"Then follow me."

The youth hesitated no longer, but stepped to the Apollo's side.

Blossom saw the twain move off, and in less than a minute they had disappeared.

Snap Shot was conducted by the mounted man over the spot where the Apaches had been stopped by the girl's repeating rifle.

Not a dead savage was to be seen, for the living had borne them away.

All at once Spanish Jack reined in his steed and before even the watchful horse-hunter could divine what was coming a clinched hand sent him reeling, while the horseman bounded to the ground to seize his victim by the throat with an exclamation of triumph.

"Want your horse, eh?" he grated, glaring at the strangling, struggling, unconscious youth. "I'll send you after him with a vengeance! I'll show you what kind of stuff Spanish Jack is made of. If you stay in this country long you'll be hunting something prettier than the white steed you call White Rocket. It's Spanish Jack's opinion that you'll never mount the snowy horse again, Snap Shot. Caramba! Isn't the girl a beauty! Old Domez's wildest dreams did not exaggerate her loveliness."

Spanish Jack threw the now unconscious youth to the ground and sprung toward his horse.

He found two horses where he had left but one; one of the Indian steeds had come back, probably in search of his master.

"What luck is better than this?" exclaimed the stampeder, when he found the new horse in his possession. "I will not have to go back to the girl on foot. The Apache horse will carry the youngster straight into Red Heart's camp."

A few words will suffice to describe what followed.

With a strong rope which Spanish Jack took from beneath one of the broad skirts of his saddle, Snap Shot was lashed to the back of the Indian horse.

"Now for White Rocket's grazing-ground! I'll send you on your horse-hunt, boy, in a manner you never dreamed of."

Spanish Jack's hand moved to his bowie as he spoke, and a moment later the glittering blade was lifted over the youth's heart.

"Take this knife to Red Heart with Spanish Jack's compliments. The old chief will recognize the bowie!"

But the last word was drowned by the ringing crack of a rifle, and, as the bloodless blade was knocked from the Tiger's hand, the Apache horse went off like an arrow!

"Heavens! who did that?" cried Spanish Jack, as he cocked the revolvers he had whipped from his belt. "I want the mean skunk to know that he has interfered in my business."

"And I'm hyer to tell you that I've been huntin' fer the man who sent one dead man down the mountain to-night with a bowie in his heart! I'm Old Eclipse, an' I mean bizness!"

A human figure leaped into the trail.

"Old Eclipse! The very man I want to see." Three arms went up at the same moment, but there seemed to be but one report.

With a wild cry Spanish Jack reeled away and fell tottering against his horse!

CHAPTER IV.

TURNING THE TABLES.

OLD ECLIPSE started toward his antagonist, revolver in hand, but before the twain could come to ether the Arizona horse bounded forward and passed the old man like an arrow from a Pawnee bow.

"Triggers an' bowies!" ejaculated Eclipse, staring at the animal rapidly disappearing. "The hoss has taken his rider with him, whether dead er a alive I don't know."

A human figure was seen clinging to the Tiger's steed, and while the old miner spoke both horse and man disappeared.

"Wal, I found Spanish Jack an' lost him ag'in. I never saw a dead man hang to a hoss thet way. The Tiger must hav' life in his heart, fer a person, no matter how good he kin shoot, can't hit every time after dark. By Jehosaphat! I'll not let 'im git away in thet manner. Didn't I tell the men ov Redeye thet I'd kill the man what druv the bowie to the stranger's heart?"

A low and peculiar call brought a horse to the old man's side, and he was about to throw himself into the saddle when a girlish voice made him turn.

"You hyer, Blossom? I war goin' off fer a spell but not to stay long, I hope. What hez happened? Do you know who hez been hyer?"

"Yes."

"Did he insult you?—did he touch you?—Spanish Jack, I mean."

The mountain beauty seemed to breathe freer.

"I saw but little of him," she said. "To tell the truth—"

"I'll listen to thet when I git back," interrupted Eclipse. "I only scratched the mean yaller snake. I've got to kill 'im afore dawn. Go back to the shanty an' wait fer me, Blossom."

Old Eclipse, Trump Card of Arizona.

I'll come ez sartain ez water runs down hill. Thar! that's a dandy gal," and Old Eclipse kissed the unresisting creature as he concluded.

In another moment a horse was bearing the old man away in the direction taken by Spanish Jack and the boy horse-hunter, and Blossom was left to her own reflections.

She had not dared to ask Eclipse about Snap Shot, but she felt that something had happened to the youth for he was not there.

Would they ever meet again?

She could not dismiss the horse-hunter's fine figure, nor his handsome face, and she wondered like a simple mountain flower that she was whether all the youths in the San Carlos country possessed his bravery and his deep black eyes.

Blossom soon went back to the mountain cabin.

Once more she was its only occupant, and on the couch which she sought in its gloom she pictured to herself a terrific race for life over the wildest of trails.

She saw a horse bearing Spanish Jack away in his gaudy garments, and not far behind him rode his pursuer Old Eclipse, urging his steed to extra exertions while his eyes flashed fire.

Blossom's imagination was not too vivid.

Two magnificent steeds were flying down a mountain-trail and, although half a mile separated them, their riders were unsparing with the spur and the breaths of each came fast.

"I'd be myself once more if I had a weapon!" said the man on the foremost horse. "That infernal bullet that sent me reeling against my horse made me drop my revolvers; the first shot carried off my bowie just as I was about to present it to that young horse-hunter. *Caramba!* but I'd like to meet you on an equality, Eclipse! I'd ride over you back to that mountain daisy. She's struck my fancy more than any woman I ever saw. Ah! Spanish Jack, are you going to keep ahead of the man who wants your blood? By the eternal, no!"

The horse stopped as the last word was spoken and stood panting under his rider's weight on the lonely trail.

"The mad old fool comes on!" continued Spanish Jack. "He hasn't counted on me stopping here. Come, Monterey! we're going back."

He turned his horse's head toward the animal that was rushing madly on.

For a moment Spanish Jack glared fiercely down the trail, though he could see nothing; then, with a curse on his lips, he struck his steed savagely with the spurs.

"You and I for it, Eclipse!" he exclaimed. "You have found and lost Spanish Jack once to-night, but you are going to find him again!"

Did Old Eclipse know that the Arizona Tiger had turned and was bearing down upon him again with his whole nature aroused?

If he did he did not slacken his horse's speed, but kept on as rapidly as before.

The two mad men were swiftly nearing each other; a collision—and such a one!—was unavoidable.

Spanish Jack was skirting the left-hand side of the starlit trail, his left hand grasped the rein, and his body leaned toward the center of the road, his right hand free but half clinched, and his eyes—they seemed living coals of fire!

On, on he came, his horse nearing Old Eclipse by many a bound, and rapidly lessening the distance between him and his master's foe.

"My God! the yaller hound's comin' back!" suddenly exclaimed the man from Redeye.

Old Eclipse looked ahead but could not see his enemy, still the rapid galloping told him that he was coming on with the irresistible sweep of a thunderbolt.

"Here is Spanish Jack!" suddenly said a startling voice.

At that same moment the two steeds met.

Old Eclipse tried to strike down the hand that shot swiftly at his throat, but as well might he have tried to ward off a rifle-ball.

A wild cry of exultation cut the night air as that same mad hand closed on the old man's trachea.

Despite his hasty preparation and strength, Old Eclipse felt himself lifted from the saddle and his horse shot on.

Spanish Jack's fingers seemed to sink into his throat as the Tiger's horse kept up his break-neck gait despite his additional load.

All at once Old Eclipse felt himself falling; the claws of the Arizona Tiger had left his throat.

He struck the ground at the same time that Spanish Jack leaped from his animal.

A thick mist swam before the old man's eyes, for the fingers of his foe had almost deprived him of his senses.

"Spanish Jack sometimes turns on his foes!" were the Tiger's first words, as he glared at Old Eclipse who had struggled to his feet and was still gasping for fresh air.

"So I see," was the response. "Heavens! what a grip you have, Spanish!"

"Have I?" and the Arizonian Tiger supplemented his question with a light laugh. "My hand is as sure as my revolver when it darts at an enemy's throat. I've learnt more tricks than one by practice, Eclipse. So you fellows found the man to whom I gave a bowie awhile ago."

"We found him. He joined us somehow and rode with us almost to Redeye."

Spanish Jack smiled.

"That man was a fool," he said. "He thought he alone was a match for me. He accused me of stampeding his herd, and he left the ranch, where he had better stayed, to find Spanish Jack. Well, he found him."

"I should say he did from what I saw," said Old Eclipse, his mind going back to the dead man who had joined the men of Redeye with a bowie in his heart. "You war about to serve the boy the same way."

"That little horse-hunter—yes!" was the reply. "You would not have treated him much better if you could have seen what I saw tonight."

"What's that, Spanish?"

"He made love to the girl you call Blossom."

The old miner recoiled with a mad exclamation.

"A boy—make—love to—Blossom?" he flashed. "I don't allow that. I have sworn that she should live for nobody but Old Eclipse."

"When did you take that oath?"

"When I found the girl."

"Under the wagon after the massacre?"

"Yes."

Old Eclipse seemed astonished by Spanish Jack's knowledge of the past.

"I know something about Blossom's past history you see, Eclipse," said the Tiger. "Do you think nobody will ever get her?"

"They shall not! By Jove! I will hunt that boy down. So he made love to her—to Blossom? I don't allow that! The man that loves that girl is Old Eclipse's eternal enemy!"

"She'll be her own mistress by and by."

"When will that time be?"

"When that will be no Old Eclipse to look after her."

The tone in which Spanish Jack's words were couched must have disclosed the real meaning of his last sentence.

"For some people that time shall never come!" cried the old man. "You have seen the gal to-night. War it for the first time, Spanish Jack?"

"It was, but I had heard of her before. Her fame has not been confined to the mountains that hem her in. It has crossed the borders of territory on the east and the south. She's lovelier than I ever dreamed her to be. I'd give my horses for her, Eclipse, but I'm going to get her cheaper than that."

"You are?"

"I am."

A moment's silence followed.

The two men stood erect scarcely five feet apart; Spanish Jack's sombrero lay on the ground, and his wealth of midnight hair no longer concealed by it fell over his broad shoulders.

"I strike for Blossom this time, Eclipse!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Stand on the defensive, old pard. Spanish Jack has been well named the Tiger of Arizona."

With flashing eyes Old Eclipse braced himself as the Yellow Tiger threw himself forward.

Weaponless—for the old miner's adventures had cost him knife and revolvers—the two mountain characters came together for the third time that night.

Once more the Tiger's bronzed hand shot at Old Eclipse's throat; the men grappled like wrestlers, and pitted strength against strength.

They were fighting for the most beautiful prize the Arizonian mountains ever contained.

They went to the ground together, but continued the struggle.

"Blossom shall love none but Old Eclipse. I have made that my oath and I shall keep it."

"Not to-night, old fellow. Blossom shall live to love the Yellow Tiger of Arizona!"

Thirty minutes later a horse bore a man toward the cabin on the mountain trail.

This man wore an embroidered jacket and a sombrero with a wide fringed band.

"I didn't lie! Spanish Jack you can go back and make love to Blossom, the Mongolian

daisy!" exclaimed the man in a triumphant tone.

The rider was the Tiger; he had left Old Eclipse behind him.

He kept on until he reined in his steed in front of the hunted hut.

"Here I am at last!" he said.

At that moment the door flew open and a startled voice rung in his ears.

"Aim at his head, and when I count three fire! One—"

The Tiger of Arizona recoiled with a cry of horror.

CHAPTER V.

THE TIGER GETS NEW CLAWS.

A LIGHT that illuminated the interior of the cabin enabled Spanish Jack to take in the whole situation at a glance.

Not a moment was to be lost, for he was covered by a rifle, at whose trigger was a finger that fairly itched to send the bullet on its mission of death.

"One—two—"

"Here's for it!" passed through the Tiger's brain.

He spoke fiercely to his horse, as he threw himself forward on the heated neck.

In an instant—the twinkling of an eye—Monterey shot forward, clearing an incredible number of feet the first bound.

A cry of disappointment rose behind him, but Spanish Jack kept on.

Suddenly the report of a rifle echoed in his rear, and a bullet clipp'd the fringe from one of the ribbons attached to his sombrero.

"That's as good as a mile, my friend!" ejaculated Jack. "If I had remained in front of the cabin a moment longer, the Southern ranches would get a little rest. Never mind; I'll win the girl yet. I'm Spanish Jack still, and Spanish Jack is more than a tiger!"

The Arizonian had checked the speed of his horse, and the animal was permitted to move forward at his own gait.

"I've got to have something to fight with," the desperado went on. "Fate has been half against me to-night, and for the first time in my career I find myself without a weapon—not so much as a knife. I'll ride on to Redeye and get a fresh supply."

To Redeye! Would Spanish Jack ride into that mountain camp to re-arm himself, among the men who hated him as much as they did Red Flash and his Apaches?

Having spoken his determination in resolute tones, the dare-devil kept on and turned his horse into the broader trail which led to Redeye.

The night was far spent, and the first winds of morning were dallying among the mountain bushes that fringed the trail.

Redeye was not far away, and Jack's varied experience told him that he was likely to find somebody awake there.

It is seldom that the camps of the far Southwest become quiet.

Where the only inhabitants are men as wild as their rough surroundings, somebody, owl-like, is awake all through the night, not so much to watch as to win from his neighbor, if possible, his hard-gotten dust.

Redeye was no exception to the rule, only that the times of which we write were not flush times, and its citizens were compelled to play for something else besides gold and silver.

There were well-worked mines near the camp, but the Apaches—those wild red children of the Southwest whom no peace can conquer—had pestored the Mongolian district for a long time, running off horses, plundering mining-camps, and keeping the whites constantly on their guard.

Spanish Jack knew all this; he knew, too, that he could not enter Redeye without being noticed, yet he was going thither for the purpose of re-arming himself.

He kept straight on until he saw the forms of the rough cabins in the morning starlight.

"I'm no welcome visitor here!" he exclaimed, to himself. "Let me see: there's a chap here called Thunder Sam; at least he was here last summer when I stampeded Redeye's horses. He followed me two hundred miles—the closest chase I ever had. Yes, I know you, Thunder Sam. I am not likely to forget a hunter like you."

Although Spanish Jack was entering Redeye for the first time, he guided his horse straight toward the place where, above all others, he was most likely to find some one.

Suddenly a coarse laugh and an oath struck his ears.

"They're at it!" Spanish Jack said with a

smile, and he halted in front of a large log cabin whose door stood wide, and beyond whose threshold he saw the night-owls of Redeye.

A large rough table occupied the middle of the room.

Four men occupied seats around it, and several others stood by, interested spectators of the game which had been kept up through the greater part of the night.

Spanish Jack's eyes glistened while from his saddle he surveyed this scene.

He saw the arms his coveted, the deadly revolver and the gleaming bowie.

With them he could go back to the cabin in the mountain and meet on an equality the enemy whose rifle had almost sent a bullet whistling through his brain a short time before.

Noiselessly, and with his eyes transfixing the gamblers of Redeye, the Arizona Tiger slipped from his saddle and glided toward the cabin.

The figure of one of the spectators prevented the light from falling upon the Tiger, and in the shadow cast by the burly desperado Spanish Jack advanced.

From the moment that he crossed the threshold he had selected his victim—his eyes were riveted upon the butts of two revolvers that rested on the man's broad hips.

All at once the Tiger's hands darted at the weapons and closed on them with triumph.

The next instant a wild cry filled the cabin, and as the robbed miner recoiled and threw the light upon the despoiler, the gamblers leaped up with their hands at the butts of their revolvers.

"Not so fast, men of Redeye!" calmly said Spanish Jack, stepping back and presenting the cocked pistols at the startled group. "The first man what lifts a hand will get his eternal doom. Ha! you know me, Thunder Sam. I did not know I was paying you back for that long chase when I armed myself. By George! I'm glad to see you—glad that you survived that man-hunt. Of course you men know me now."

Yes, they all know him.

Despite his wild deeds of the past, they were astonished at his audacity.

Thunder Sam's eyes glared at him like the orbs of a cornered lion.

"Don't I know you?" he exclaimed. "Didn't Ioller you two hundred miles once—the longest and hottest chase I s'pose you ever had?"

"That it was; but I am back again. This time on a matter of business, to which I have attended," said the Tiger of Arizona. "Your revolver, Thunder Sam, will come back to Redeye one of these days. I'm only borrowing them."

These words were enough to madden the seven men held at bay in the hut.

They advanced an inch.

"Thar!" cried Spanish Jack, "another inch an' I'll try Thunder's revolvers. When it comes to business like this I'd just as soon kill white men as red-skins. Stand whar you are! I'm not here afoot. The best here is Arizona, except one, stands in front of this shanty."

He stepped back, but the revolvers were not lowered a hair's breadth, and more than one of the menaced seven saw that his yellow fingers touched the triggers.

As noiseless as he had entered the cabin, the Arizona Tiger approached the door again; his right foot crossed the threshold, then his left one followed, and he stood beneath the stars armed to the teeth once more.

Not until he was three feet from the cabin did one of his arms drop.

"You shall have your men-killers again, Thunder—I swear it," he said.

"And so do I," grated Thunder Sam. "I willoller you to the Rio Grande but what I get 'em back! This time I'll not give up the hunt as I did before. By heavens, Spanish Jack, this trip to Redeye seals your doom!"

The yellow visor laughed defiantly.

While it rung out, the seven reached the door of the cabin.

"This will make you remember my visit to Redeye!" said the Tiger, and a shot succeeded.

One of the men threw up his hands and fell against his comrades.

"Your revolvers are daisies, Thunder Sam!" followed the shot, and before the startled men of Redeye could respond, a horse went down the only thoroughfare the camp could boast of, bearing away the greatest villain in Arizona.

Six men rushed frantically from the cabin, and the same number of revolvers lighted up the night with flashes of fire, and leaden missiles sought the heart of Spanish Jack.

But back from the darkness came a laugh that

told the men of Redeye, that the king of stampedes was still able to keep his saddle.

It was a wild, triumphant, defiant laugh.

"No more shootin'!" cried Thunder Sam, dashing the revolvers down. "Let's go back an' swar over Buckhorn Bill the biggest oath ov vengeance ever heard in Redeye."

The six men went back to the cabin where the dead gambler lay, and as the rest of the desperate citizens of the camp appeared on the scene, Spanish Jack rose in his stirrups a mile away, and waving his sombrero above his head sent up three triumphant cheers.

The Tiger had got new claws.

CHAPTER VI.

THUNDER SAM'S INJUN POT-PIE.

THE eventful night—eventful to Redeye at least—was passing away at last.

While day was breaking in the east, the denizens of the camp stood over Buckhorn Bill who lay where he had fallen by Spanish Jack's revolver.

The terrible oath of vengeance had been taken, and such an oath, too!

The stampeder had vexed Arizona long enough; he had even invaded Redeye, jerked two revolvers from the belt of Thunder Sam, and with them taken the life of Buckhorn Bill!

His last deed cried aloud for revenge.

Over the dead desperado, Thunder Sam selected three men who were to accompany him on his hunt.

He knew them all; he had seen them tried in more than one desperate encounter, and they were eager to come up with the Tiger who had invaded the camp.

Away went the four in the first gleams of daylight, well mounted, well armed, and burning for revenge.

"Let's take the shanty in on our way, an' see what's become ov Blossom," said Thunder Sam, when a mile from Redeye.

"Agreed! Who knows but that Spanish may hav gone down thar an' insulted Old Eclipse's mountain daisy? By heavens! ef he hez, we'll give him extra punishment!"

So the four hunters turned into the trail that ran past the mountain lodge and urged their horses on.

As they neared the hut, their ears were saluted with the songs of birds, and nature smiled on every hand.

It was just such a morning that delights thousands of people, but it possessed no charms for the quartette, whose revolvers were carried at full cock in their belts, and whose bowies hung loosely in the buckskin sheaths.

Thunder Sam glanced at his companions when he saw the mountain cabin a short distance ahead, and, motioning them to fall behind, he rode on.

To the rough's surprise, he found the little door wide open and an aspect of loneliness about the place.

"I guess the Tiger ov Arizona has been hyer!" parted Thunder Sam's lips as he approached the hut. "Ef he has touched Blossom, woe to his o'ney hide! I'll make this territory, big as it is, too hot to hold him."

A few yards further on Thunder Sam drew rein.

Once more he was in front of the girl's mountain home, thinking not of how he had ridden away from the revolver that "covered" him from the hand of Blossom.

Leaning toward the logs from his saddle, the man from Redeye put one hand upon them and poked his unhandsome face into the hut.

"Hello, Blossom!" he called.

There was no response.

"Je's as I expected; she ain't hyer!" he exclaimed, whirling upon his companions as they hastened forward. "I'll bet my claims that Spanish Jack knows whar the mountain daisy is."

Thunder Sam threw himself from the saddle and rushed into the cabin, but the next second he recoiled with a furious oath.

"Injuns! Injuns!" also rang from his throat. "The infernal Apaches—"

His sentence was broken by the sharp reports of his companions' revolvers as they opened on the red skins who were swarming from the hut.

Thunder Sam reached his horse, but not the saddle.

"Death to the red skunks!" he roared, facing the Apaches with a revolver in each hand. "No quarter an' no surrender, men ov Redeye!"

Awed by the deadly fire of the quartette's weapons, the Indians fell back into the cabin and slammed the door in the desperadoes' faces.

All, however, did not get safely behind the

portals, for in front of it lay six who would never stampede horses again.

"Heavens! that war a close call!" ejaculated Thunder Sam. "I hedjis' got beyond the door when suthin' closed on my arm. I knowed what it war, an' back I went. Now!" and his eyes flashed exultantly. "We've got the red devils everlasting cooped up, an' I'm willin' to take an oath that they've fired their last arrears! Wa ch that door with yer men-killers, boys, while I git things ready fer the final scene."

Thunder Sam saw the door covered with six revolvers before he moved off, and commenced to collect an armful of dry twigs which everywhere littered the ground.

When he rejoined his companions he deposited his collections against the hut and produced several matches from a pocket in his dirty buckskin jacket.

"Now look out, pard's! They'll rush fer it when the fire cracks," he said. "Four it into 'em when the door opens, an' don't let one ov the red varmints out. Thar's nothin' like an Apache pot-pie, an' I kin git one up to perfection when I've got a chance like this."

The snap of a match followed his last word, and then came the cracking of the dry twigs.

Fearless, like all men of his class, and with the utmost confidence in the revolvers of his pards, Thunder Sam fanned the flames with his bronzed hands until they had made good headway.

Then he rose, and walking back to his horse, drew his revolvers again, and madly watched the hut.

As the fire caught the cabin door in its embrace, it roared out the speedy doom of Blossom's home.

Yet not an Indian showed himself.

"They ain't fools enough to be roasted alive!" Thunder Sam said. "They'll make the grand break in a little while. Thet old shanty's almost too hot to hold 'em now. Look out fer 'em, boys. Keep yer fingers on yer triggers."

The flames crept up the logs, devouring them as they advanced; a large hole had burned through the door.

"It beats me, I swan it does!" the head desperado was forced to exclaim. "Didn't we jes' drive more than a dozen Apaches back into that shanty?"

"Ther war fourteen on 'em, Thunder; I counted 'em."

"Fourteen, then. Ar' they goin' to stay in thar an' burn up without makin' a break fer liberty! Thet's not Apache grit—not the kind I've seen tried fifty times in my career. Look! thar goes the door!"

At that moment the door, burned from its wooden hinges, fell inward amid a shower of sparks, and the flames kept outside no longer, rushed into the cabin with vengeful roar!

The avengers of Redeye drew back from the terrible heat, and looked at the burning hut with perplexed countenances.

"By thunder! this place is bewitched!" suddenly exclaimed Thunder Sam. "Thar ain't an Injin in that cabin, an' we druv fourteen back into it awhile ago. Look! the fire sweeps the hull inside ov the blamed place. It would melt a cast-iron man in five minutes."

Although the leader of the quartette used strong language, the occasion seemed to justify it.

The mountain cabin was a mass of seething fire, and the four men from a distance watched it with feelings that cannot be described.

All at once a chorus of wild Indian yells rose above the roar of the flames.

"The Apache varmints!" grated Thunder Sam. "By hokey! they're the same devils we cooped up in the cabin!"

The men from Redeye turned to the north as the van of a body of Indians appeared on the trail.

"Stand yer ground, pard's!" cried Thunder Sam. "We kin hev an Injin pot-pie yet! Death to the red skunks ov Arizona!"

This time the red-skins were not awed by the revolvers toward which they rode.

The mountain rung with exultant yells as pell-mell down the trail on excellent steeds the Apaches came to engage their foes.

The band was headed by a magnificent Indian, who rode a splendid snow-white horse, faultless in limb and with glowing eyes.

"White Rocket, the younger's hev!" broke from Thunder Sam's lips. "Who couldn't hunt such an animal ez that? By Jove! I'll swap horses with that red-skin!"

A minute sufficed to bring the combatants together.

With their deadly revolvers thrust forward,

Old Eclipse, Trump Card of Arizona.

Thunder Sam and his companions met the dashing onset.

"Pour it into 'em!" the former shouted, and the battle opened with unwonted fury.

But revolvers, however well aimed, could not check that mad red mob.

Although more than one Apache reeled from their saddles, which, for the most part, were well worn blankets, the others came on, their wild yells increasing and their heels, sometimes supplied with spurs, incessantly pounding their horses' flanks.

Into the ranks of their relentless foes the four men emptied their revolvers, and then, for the Indians had not been checked for a moment, they drew their bowies.

"Make sure work with the heart-picks!" cried Thunder Sam, and he added under his breath: "It looks to me ez ef the Apaches ar' goin' to make the pot-pie."

The next moment Thunder Sam spurred his horse toward the red-skins.

He did not look behind to see whether he was followed.

"That white hoss er death!" he grated. "Ef I git 'im, Snap Shot shall go back to ther ranch without 'im! He's as pretty as Blossom, blame my skin ef he ain't!"

Toat instant Thunder Sam reached the Indian squadron. Thirty red hands darted at him, but his gleaming bowie leaped through them all.

"Thunder Sam forever!" he shouted. "You rile a hull tribe ov catamounts when you stir this animile up. Hyer's the varmint I want."

The Indians who filled the mountain pass could not prevent the mountaineer's deed; his hand was quicker than their sight.

The red rider of the white horse darted at Thunder Sam, but the onslaught that met him half way was irresistible.

"This hoss is worth a gold mine, chief," he said. "I'll settle with you fer stealin' 'im an' save ther boy the trouble."

Vainly did the Apache warrior dart at the uplifted hand.

Down came the miner's bowie, and as the red chief reeled, he was swept from the horse by Thunder Sam's left arm, and a wild yell announced that Little Snap Shot's horse had changed owner!

"Now, git out ov my way!" shouted Sam to the Indians, as he wheeled the white steed and drew the bloody bowie back. "I'm a thousand grizzlies rolled into one. This hoss is mine forever! Cl'ar the track!"

The strength of the white horse and the menacing knife made the red ranks separate.

"Come on, pard'l!" cried Thunder Sam to his comrades as he dashed down the living gantlet, but he did not look behind him.

"Thet's what I call bizness!" he said when he found himself beyond the foe. "Who wouldn't risk what I hev fer such a hoss? He'd bring a thousand in Prescott, an' five in 'Frisco; but a world wouldn't buy 'im from me."

Proud of the prize he had won at the bowie's point, Thunder Sam urged the horse on until he was satisfied that the red-skins were not thundering at his heels.

"This isn't huntin' Spanish Jack," he said suddenly. "But what's the use ov huntin' him on such a hoss? Let me find Blossom, an' hang me ef somebody else can't avenge Buckhorn Bill."

"That's what I say, Thunder Sam; but who's taken my pet off?"

At these words the man from Redeye turned and found himself face to face with the last person he expected to confront there.

"Wal, ef it isn't Old Eclipse himself, shoot me fer a rattler!" he ejaculated.

"That's who I am!" was the answer, as the speaker came forward, nor halted until he laid his hand on Thunder Sam's leg and looked up into his face. "I've been to ther outskirts ov eternity more'n once since I've seen you, Thunder; but every time my determination fetched me awav. Whar's the girl—my mountain Blossom? You will go with me back to the lodge, won't you?"

Thunder Sam smiled.

"Thar's no lodge any more, Eclipse," he said.

"What's become ov it?"

"I'm goin' to play honest. I set it on fire."

The old miner started back with blazing eyes.

"You? You set fire to Blossom's home?"

By heavens! Thunder Sam—"

"Thar! thet'll do!" was the interruption.

"Hear me thrugh, old man. We cooked up fourteen Injuns in the hut, an' I tried to make an Apache pot-pie, but hang me ef one war scorched, an' we burned the cabin down."

"They found the underground trail," said Old Eclipse.

"Thet's it!" exclaimed Sam. "I thought Old Nick helped the red varmints to git away."

CHAPTER VII.

FORCED TO DISGORGE.

THE mystery o' the Indian's escape from the burning cabin was now explained, but Thunder Sam forgot them a moment after Old Eclipse's explanation.

He was looking down into the face of the man to whom Blossom was the most precious object on earth, the man who had raised her from a child, among the mountains, and who would shed his last drop of blood in her defense.

Woe to the man who loved or touched her without his consent!

He had always said this, and those who knew the old miner knew that he would make his words good.

"You say you've been nigh eternity?" said Thunder Sam after a minute's silence. "Did you find Spanish Jack?"

"Didn't I, though?" exclaimed Old Eclipse. "Did I ever hunt a man and nos find him, Thunder? Wal, I found the boss stampeder an' we hed a tussle."

"Not since he left Redeye?"

"Has he been thar?"

"I should say he has, but go on."

"The varmint got the best ov me," continued Old Eclipse. "Thet half-Mexican devil hes the strength ov a grizzly. I war completely in his power when I found myself lyin' on the edge ov a cliff. How his eyes glittered then—worse nor a catamount's, Thunder. Fer a half minute he stood over me pantin' like a feller pretty nigh played out, an' then he pounced upon me like an eagle."

"Ef I hed a knife, Eclipse," said he, "I'd fix you like I fixed the man what you fellers p'icked up awhile ago; but I hevn't a knife—not even a rope."

"Then I knew what war comin', Thunder."

"Ez sure ez heaven, Eclipse, ye'r goin' to hunt for the bottom ov the cliff," thought I.

"All to once I war fallin'—fallin' down—away down! It war awful, Tbunder. You don't know what queer things pass through a feller's brain when he's passin' through the air, an' you wouldn't b'lieve me ef I told you. When I struck I threw my arms out an' caught some limbs. Thar I war hangin' in a tree-top a mile above the foot ov the cliff fer all I know, fer I couldn't see it. Ef a man ever swore to pay an enemy back I reckon I did then."

"Oh, others did the same thing to-night," smiled Thun'jer Sam.

"Whar?"

"In Redeye, over Buckhorn Bill's carkiss."

"Who wiped him out?"

"The same yellow hound that dropped you over the cliff."

Old Eclipse gnashed his teeth for a moment.

"Ar' you on his trail now?" he suddenly asked.

"Not exactly."

"Do you think he carried Blossom off?"

"That's to be determined, Eclipse."

"Woe to him if he did! I'm worth all the dead men in Arizony! Thet girl belongs to me, an' I will kill the person what loves er touches her besides Eclipse."

"What would you do ef a feller like Thunder Sam should take a fancy to the mountain daisy?" asked Redeye's desperado.

"You're jokin' now, Thunder!" exclaimed Old Eclipse as he started and transfixed Thunder Sam with his piercing gaze. "We've been pards too long fer you to take a fancy to Blossom."

"Stranger things than that hev happened in Arizony."

Thunder Sam's seriousness seemed to force a new and terrible revelation upon Old Eclipse's mind. The bronze hand left the leg upon which it had lain.

"You—do—love—Blossom, then?" gasped Eclipse.

"Now you've guessed it," was the quick response, and Thunder Sam seemed to increase an inch in stature. "You have threatened with vengeance the man what should dare to love yer wild flower without yer consent. I'm the man! Since I've got the best horse in Arizony, I'm not goin' ter stop till I've got the best gal! You kin stan' thar an' chaw at me with yer mad eyes, Eclipse, but I'm a catamount when I've made my mind up as a lot ov Apaches hev jes' found out."

Not for a minute after Thunder Sam paused did Old Eclipse find his tongue.

The desperado's first words had driven him back several feet, but now he strode forward like a lion aroused.

"Words ar' words, but bizness is bizness!" he said. "I will keep my word, Thunder!"

His hand again fell upon Thunder Sam's leg, but the next instant it darted at his revolver.

"Not yet!" he exclaimed, dashing Old Eclipse's hand aside, for his quick eyes had anticipated the movement. "Now, sir, we will settle a part ov our difficulty hyer."

He pushed Old Eclipse back as he finished, and though the old miner attempted to recover he did not until he was ten feet away.

"I'm at your mercy," he said, looking into the revolver that covered him. "I never thought that the men ov Redeye would fall out among themselves, an' that fer Blossom."

A heartless laugh was Thunder Sam's first reply.

"At my mercy? no! Eclipse. I never hed any ov that article!" he grated. "You've come to the wrong man to talk ov that. What word hev you fer Blossom?"

"Not by you!"

"Why not?"

"Because you wouldn't take it to her."

"Try me! I sw'ar by my soul, to carry to Blossom any word you want to send. Good er bad, Eclipse, I'll take it to her. Be quick with the message ef you hev one."

"I b'lieve I'll trust you," said the old miner, as his eyes beamed with hope.

"Be quick, I say, for by the sun that gilds the sky, Eclipse, I'm goin' to make sure ov Blossom this time. I hold the winnin' hand."

"Then, tell her never to reveal the big bonanza while she is in Thunder Sam's power; tell her that this word came from me. Ah! you will never tell her this."

How Thunder Sam's eyes glistered before he replied.

Where was the "big bonanza" of which Old Eclipse spoke?

If it was in Arizona, why had he not heard of it? and he had been the old man's comrade for ten years.

"Ha! I knew you lied, Thunder Sam!" exclaimed Old Eclipse. "You will never carry my message to Blossom."

"I will. So thar is a hidden gold mine?"

The miner laughed, and seemed to incline his head toward the ruined mountain cabin miles away.

"To perdition with your bonanz s!" hissed Thunder Sam. "If one exists I will find it. Don't I hear the Apache bosses down yonder? You hear 'em too, Eclipse. Hyer ends your last trail; hyer I begin the tussle that will give me Blossom."

The revolver seemed to fall a hair's breadth.

Old Eclipse's eyes lost none of their fire at that moment.

All at once a ringing shot awoke the echoes of the mountains, and without a cry, the gray-haired miner reeled away and fell among the bushes at his back!

It was the heartless shot of a mountain demon—a shot for which there must be a retribution swift and terrible.

"Now, Thunder Sam, find the girl, wrench her from Spanish Jack, er ther boy, an' thar'll be no Eclipse an' his threats to trouble ye. Mounted on ther best animal in Arizony, you ought to be able to come out on top in any game you want to play. Come on, you mean red vermin!" And he shook his clinched hands toward that point of the compass from which sounds of hoofs came to his ears. "I'll lead you a chase that will end whar you'd rather it would not. I've jes' made one man break his word, but with yer hull tribe at my heels I'll not rupture mine! Oh! come on, an' try the mettle ov yer chief's white hoss!"

Away went the desperado from Redeye, and the spot where his victim lay silent among the brushwood was speedily left behind.

The white horse seemed to possess the speed of the wind in his little limbs.

It mattered not who he carried, he carried his rider well.

This was the matchless White Rocket, the horse to recover whom Little Snap Shot had quitted a ranch in the far South, and faced the dangers and death-trails of the Mongolian Mountains.

Thunder Sam took delight in testing the animal's speed.

He urged him over the trail until he went flying past rock and tree with almost inconceivable swiftness.

"I don't hear 'em any more. Oh, what a hoss!"

The desperado spoke thus miles and miles

from the spot where he left Old Eclipse, and in the glowing beams of the sun that fell upon him from the bluest of skies, he patted White Rocket's neck and ran his fingers through the silver mane.

The horse seemed conscious of this admiration on the part of his rider, for he turned his head and tried to look into Thunder Sam's face.

All at once a strange whistling sound saluted the rough's ears, and to his surprise the horse attempted to lie down.

In vain did Thunder Sam try to prevent him; White Rocket carried his point, and his rider was forced to leap from the saddle to escape injury.

"Who gave that signal?" he growled, as he stood beside the horse with his revolvers ready for an emergency. "I knew my hoss war a jet, but hang me ef I thought he war a trick animile! Say, you who whistled, jes' git up an' show yerself. I proclaim to all the world that this hoss b'longs to Thunder Sam, an' that that ar' no man livin' strong enough ter take 'im from me!"

Scarcely had the last word left the speaker's lips when a youthful figure slipped into view a short distance down the trail.

"The boss-hunter himself!" ejaculated Thunder Sam. "Wal, ef this ain't a pretty go, shoot me fer a rattler."

"The man who says that that horse belongs to Thunder Sam lies like a Mexican!" came over the rifle pressed against the boy's shoulder. "I am here to assert my ownership. Come here, White Rocket."

The white horse sprung up instantly.

"No you don't, my daisy!" cried Thunder Sam, springing toward the animal. "I hav taken an oath—"

"So have I! Drop that bridle-rein, you yellow dog, or I'll end my horse-hunt over your worthless corpse!"

Sam saw that these words came over the polished barrel of the leveled rifle.

"I don't really want your life; but White Rocket is worth a thousand Thunder Sams. I'll count four for you. One—two—"

The rein dropped from the desperado's hand, and a light laugh came over the rifle.

"You're a man of sense, Thunder Sam," followed the laugh. "Zip, zip, White Rocket!"

The horse pricked up his ears and rushed toward the boy with a joyous whinny.

The face of the rough was as dark as a thunder-cloud when he saw the two meet.

"Good-by, Thunder Sam. I'm much obliged to you for bringing Rocket here. We may meet again. You'd better go back to Redeye. Spanish Jack is in the country."

With the agility of a splendid horseman, Snap Shot had vaulted into the saddle, and while Thunder Sam gnashed his teeth and forgot his revolvers in his rage, the recaptured prize was bearing him from the scene.

"Go back to Redeye without neither the gal nor the hoss!" flashed the baffled devil. "I'll die with my boots on first! When I go back thar, I'll ride that white animal an' know whar Blossom is! The young chap thinks his hoss trail has ended. Blame my skin! ef it's half begun! He don't know me; but he'll get acquainted afore many hours! I'm a million cat-amounts when I'm riled an' I'm riled to the depths now, hang me ef I ain't! I'll recover that piece ov white lightnin'; I'll find the mountain daisy; an' I'll make things lively. Yes, I'm goin' to ride White Rocket into Redeye."

CHAPTER VIII.

SHOT FROM THE SADDLE.

THE reader will recollect that when we last saw Snap Shot prior to the adventure just recorded he was lashed to the back of an Apache horse which was bearing him from the mountain cabin.

This was Spanish Jack's work, and if Old Eclipse had not interfered in the nick of time and shot the bowie from the Tiger's hand, Little Snap Shot's career would have ended there and then.

We will go back to that scene only to say that Spanish Jack in his haste failed to fasten the boy securely to the horse, for a few miles from the scene of his capture he managed to get one of his hands loose. The rest was easy, and all at once the Indian steed found his rider astride his back and checking his headlong speed.

Intent on finding the Arizona Tiger, the young horse-hunter turned back and reached the cabin in time to astonish Jack with a leveled rifle when that worthy came back after his encounter with Old Eclipse.

But as we have seen, the Tiger escaped his

deadly aim by prompt action and good riding, leaving him alone with Blossom again.

From the cabin Spanish Jack went to Redeye and rearmed himself.

"A good riddance," said Blossom, when the Tiger had escaped. "May we never see the demon again."

It was needless to say that Snap Shot echoed her sentiments.

He did not want to have to fight the Arizonian Tiger, but he would not shrink from the fray; he had invaded the country for the purpose of recovering his stolen steed, that was all; but he was ready to wade through blood for the white horse.

Mounted on White Rocket once more Little Snap Shot galloped off and drew rein a short distance from the place where we left Thunder Sam cursing his ill-luck.

"What has happened?" exclaimed a sweet voice, and a young girl appeared at the white steed's side.

"I have found my horse," was the answer, as the boy's eyes shone with triumph. "Somehow or other he had fallen into Thunder Sam's hands, and it was my chance to encounter the villain down the trail. This is the animal I have talked so much about, Blossom; this is the best horse in Arizona!"

And the boy's hand ran in and out through White Rocket's flowing mane.

Blossom put up her hand and smoothed the horse's glossy coat, while the youth watched her with eyes full of admiration.

"You will go back to the old ranch now?" she said.

Snap Shot started.

"I have found my horse, that is true; but I like this country."

A pretty blush stole over Blossom's face.

"You have not seen all its people," she replied. "You have made many enemies here, and they are not of the kind who will forget you. Your horse will be hunted again. Thunder Sam may have captured him from the Indians; if he has, they will not let the trail get cold. You and White Rocket will be safer on the old ranch than here."

Little Snap Shot's gaze wandered toward the far south.

He knew that the girl's words were full of truth.

Safety for him and his white steed lay only where the green grass of the "old ranch" waved in the sun, but something seemed to hold him back.

Blossom tried to read his thoughts, while he gazed southward, but gave up baffled, and waited for him to speak, as if she knew that his words would prove the turning point of his life.

He turned upon her so suddenly that she involuntarily started.

"Why do you live here?" he asked. "It seems to me that the country I inhabit is fairer than this. We have no Thunder Sam there."

"Then you are blessed, indeed. But do not try to turn me from these mountains. You forget that Eclipse likes this land."

"Eclipse?" echoed the boy; "how I would like to meet him! I am sure I owe him my life, for he shot the bowie from Spanish Jack's hand. But you do not want me to encounter Eclipse."

Blossom's cheeks seemed to grow pale.

"I dare not tell you what he has said," were her words, while the pallor still remained. "He is a strange man in many respects, and is devoted to me. I can never forget who saved me after the Indian massacre, years ago."

"I do not ask you to forget your preserver. Would not Eclipse leave this country?"

"No."

"You are then doomed to remain until his pleasure transfers you elsewhere?"

"Yes."

"Then," said the youth, "I shall have to say good-by for the present. I will go back to the old ranch. My horse-hunt has terminated abruptly. I am seated on White Rocket's back again and this is the proudest day of my life. You shall go back to the mountain home on the best animal west of the Mississippi."

In less than a minute Old Eclipse's protegee was seated with Snap Shot on the white horse, which started off toward, though the pair knew it not, a scene of desolation.

"Heavens! what has happened?" fell suddenly from the youth's lips. "Look! smoke is rising from the spot where I fear your home stood when we left it."

Blossom looked for a moment and then uttered an exclamation of horror.

"I have no home, but forward," she said.

"The Indians have been here. They knew that Old Eclipse built the cabin and they never liked the old man whose rifle never fails him."

White Rocket went flying toward the spot where columns of dark smoke were mounting heavenward.

"The demons have been here sure enough!" flashed Snap Shot, drawing rein in front of the Mountain Lodge, now a heap of burning ruins. "As they could not secure the bird they destroyed the nest. These are the kind of deeds that will keep me in this country. Villains like this call for revenge. I have not forgot that I swore to pay the red chief who took White Rocket from the old ranch.

Blossom did not speak, but gazed sadly upon the scenes of desolation that surrounded her.

Not one log had been left upon another; the flames had done their fiendish work.

"Now," said the boy, breaking in upon Blossom's sad reverie, "now you are ready to leave this country, are you not? Let me offer you a home where I know you will be happy; let me—"

"You are very kind, but I cannot accept. Eclipse will build me another cabin."

Little Snap Shot seemed to grate his teeth.

"Old Eclipse!" he said, under his breath. "Why does that strange man cross my path every time? He may not find you for some time," he said to the girl, "and you must be sheltered somewhere."

"I can seek the camp."

"Redeye?"

"Yes."

"That camp, you have told me, is Thunder Sam's lair."

"Ah! but I don't fear that fellow," and the girl smiled. "Yes, I shall go to Redeye until Eclipse comes."

"To Redeye then!" exclaimed the young horse-hunter; but Blossom's hand fell warningly upon his arm.

"For the last time, perhaps, let me say, 'Go back to the old ranch.' You have found your horse, and to recover him you entered this country. I can go to Redeye alone, and I assure you I will get along with its citizens, who are my protector's friends."

"No!" answered Snap Shot, firmly. "Since you have determined to take up your abode in Redeye, I shall set you down there. Please do not remonstrate with me again. My mind has been made up. I am quite eager to see Redeye, the capital of this wild land, and I will not ride for the old ranch until I have seen it. Come, White Rocket, we are going to Redeye."

With this the white steed started off, and was soon coursing swiftly down the road that led to the mountain camp.

"Yonder is the camp!" exclaimed Blossom, pointing down the mountain at a collection of rough cabins that stood in the sunlight. "Now, if you will halt here, and let me—"

"Not yet!" laughed Snap Shot. "I am going to take you to your new home," and the spurs sent White Rocket swifter than ever over the trail. Not until the horse had borne the young couple to the center of the wild capital of the district did he check his gait.

Then a word, and not the rein, stopped him.

"So this is Redeye, eh?" ejaculated Snap Shot, as he turned to help Blossom from her seat. "What has become of its people? I don't see a living soul."

"I do! Look yonder! Merciful heavens! you are gone!"

Little Snap Shot turned just as a tall man, who e-head was bandaged with a bloody rag, stepped from a cabin a few yards away.

"Curse your heart, you've touched the girl without my consent!" grated this individual, against whose shoulder a rifle leaped madly. "I swore to kill the man who did that, an' I will!"

Blossom threw herself from the white horse and sprang toward the man with a startling cry.

"No puttin' in fer him, Blossom!" rung out over the leveled rifle. "I'm old Eclipse, an' don't you forget it?"

A thrilling report checked Blossom's speed, and as she turned to the horse she saw his young rider throw up his arms and pitch from the saddle with a cocked revolver in his hand.

The weapon fell at her feet.

"I've met Old Eclipse at last!" gasped the boy, looking up into her face as she stooped over him.

Before she could reply a startling voice grated on her hearing,

"Don't touch the young viper, girl! I'm going to finish him, hang me ef I ain't!"

"Not while I can defend him!" exclaimed Blossom, whirling upon the speaker with Snap

Shot's revolver glistening in her hand. "Though you are Old Eclipse, you shall not complete the work you have begun. Halt, and lower your rifle! If you advance another step with it in that position I will send a bullet crashing through your brain."

CHAPTER IX.

A JEALOUS MOUNTAINEER.

"If you dare!" said the girl's flashing eyes, though her lips remained closed behind the word that ends the preceding chapter.

Snap Shot had fainted and lay at her feet, to all outward appearances dead; but she stood resolutely in front of him, menacing Old Eclipse with the revolver.

"Hang me ef I ever thought she'd do that!" murmured the old miner. "She'll be wantin' to marry the young tenderfoot ef my bullet hezn't fixed him fer good. I can't march for'ard another step. I never thought Blossom would hold a drop on me."

With this, Old Eclipse very sensibly lowered his rifle, amid the smiles of the rough men who had been drawn from the cabins by the startling shot.

Blossom watched him narrowly as he came forward, a dark cloud on his brow and angry flashes in his eyes.

"Who is he, girl?" he asked, looking from the unconscious horse-hunter to his protegee.

"Snap Shot he calls himself."

"By hokey! he's no tenderfoot after all. Anybody kin see that with half an eye. Jehosaphat! what a boss!" And Old Eclipse began to admire the white steed which had not moved since the fall of his rider. "I say, Blossom, you an' this youngster hev dissolved partnership, now, hevn't ye?"

"We never had any interests in common. He was bringing me to Redeye, nothing more."

"A kind ov escort, hey?"

"Call it what you will."

"Wal, we'll hev to 'tend him till he mends, then—then, by Jove! Blossom, he'll hev ter pack an' travel."

By this time the girl and Snap Shot were surrounded by the entire population of Redeye.

"Corral that animile! he's a dandy!" suddenly exclaimed one of the men, and half a dozen hands moved toward White Rocket's bridle-rein.

But the horse was not going to be "corralled," for all at once he threw up his head and darted off with a wild snort.

Blossom heard the clicking of deadly locks and instantly threw herself before the would-be horse-catchers.

"Don't slaughter the horse like that!" she cried. "That boy has risked his life for his property; give him another chance for it. Down with your weapons!"

The last sentence was more a command than an appeal, and the horse was allowed to disappear without being stopped by a bullet.

"Now carry the boy into one of the cabins and dress his wound," the girl continued turning upon Old Eclipse.

"I guess I'll hev to touch 'im arter all, Blossom; but hang my old frame! ef I wouldn't sooner bury him. Grin an' bear it, Eclipse. It won't be for long, thank fortin'!"

A moment later Little Snap Shot was lifted from the ground, and the old miner was bearing him toward one of the cabins.

The dirty-shirted roughs followed him with their eyes; but Blossom walked at the miner's side, carrying the horse-hunter's hat, and anxiously regarding his pale face.

Not a word passed between her and Old Eclipse until the cabin's threshold had been crossed, and Snap Shot lay on a rough couch under the one window beside the door.

"In the first place, Blossom, look hyer," suddenly exclaimed the old man, pulling down the bloody bandage about his head, and displaying to her gaze a deep red furrow in which she could have placed two of her fingers side by side.

"Who did that?"

"Who but the on'riest man in Arizony," was the answer.

"Spanish Jack?"

"No. Spanish Jack's a gentleman compared to the devil what marked Old Eclipse fer life. The Tiger would push a feller over a cliff; but hang me, ef I believe he'd deliberately shoot a helpless man. Thunder Sam is the boss demon's name."

The girl started.

"He will come back to Redeye no more!" she exclaimed.

"I hope he will, an' while I'm hyer. I would

willingly pass in my checks on death's counter if he'd come back to Redeye only fer five minutes! He shot to kill, but suthin' turned his ball. War it fate, Blossom? You used to say that fate fetched me to you arter that Injun massacre, when I found you under the Conestoga. When I recovered arter Thunder Sam had left me fer dead, instead ov goin' to ther Mountain Lodge, I came hyer. The fact is, girl, I didn't know whar I war goin' fer sartain. I fell down like one dead in the street, but the boys dressed my wound, an' put me on my pins ag'in. You know what I've always said. Nobody shall ever love you but Old Eclipse. That boy war in a fair way fer doin' it when he came hyer, but he mustn't do it, Blossom. He may never see his white hoss ag'in ef he does!"

"He has never mentioned love," said the girl. "But we must not neglect him."

"I'll not do that ef he's the bitterest enemy I ever had."

Little Snap Shot's wound was now searched for and found.

To Blossom's relief, so indicated by her looks, it was pronounced not very dangerous.

Old Eclipse said that the worst thing he saw about it was that it would keep the youth confined to the cabin for some days, when he ought to be riding back to the ranch somewhere in the South.

It was evident that the miner wished that his shot had proved more deadly.

"What! White Rocket gone again?" exclaimed the horse-hunter, when Blossom broke to him an account of the white steed's exit from Redeye. "I will have to begin my hunt over. There is no telling into whose hands my horse will fall next; but I will find him! He shall carry me back to the old ranch, if I have to fight a thousand enemies single-handed."

Determination lighted up the speaker's eyes, and the girl who was his only auditor transfixed him with an admiring gaze.

Not once during that long day did she leave the little cabin in which Snap Shot had been forced to take up his quarters.

The door stood wide open to admit the bracing air, and the two young people thus strangely brought together conversed until the night approached again.

"I don't care which comes first!" exclaimed Old Eclipse, as he brought his bronzed hand down upon the rough counter in the log saloon and gambling hell of Redeye.

Ten men heard him.

"I say I don't care a cuss which comes first—death to the boy er Thunder Sam back to Redeye!" he continued. "I hevn't any choice. Don't I know that if Snap Shot gits well the jig is up 'twixt me an' the daisy what I've raised from a shoot? An' to think that Blossom herself should guide him to Redeye! Spanish Jack? Oh, I've fergotten him! He did throw me over a cliff, an' left me to take care ov myself, which I did. Arter that he came to Redeye an' armed himself, did he? Why didn't he finish Thunder Sam instead of Bu'khorn Bill? When I go back to the shanty what will I see? That girl sittin' close to the hoss-hunter an' listenin' to his infernal palaver. No! no more liquor fer me. I'm goin' back to em' sober."

The old Arizonian strode toward the door of the den.

"Hyer, boys, take my weepins," he said suddenly, stopping there and disarming himself. "I'm afraid ov myself to-night, break my old neck ef I ain't! Ef I went, go yonder an' see Blossom close to the youngster I might do suthin' desprit. No man shall ever make love to the mountain daisy an' live. That's my old oath."

Old Eclipse laid his bowie and revolvers side by side on the counter, and turned to the door once more.

He had scarcely reached the open air when he stopped and listened.

"Thar's a boss comin' this way like a cyclone," he said, speaking aloud as if addressing some one, and his eyes blazed as he listened. "Hyer I am without a weepin', but hang me ef I'm goin' to touch the shooters any more to-night."

He listened under the stars a moment longer, and then darted toward the cabin he had just left.

"Hosses!" he exclaimed, appearing at the door.

The occupants of the place sprung across the threshold and halted on the outside with revolvers in their hands.

Every man seemed to hold his breath.

All at once a horse with head erect and mane and tail streaming in the breeze, went past the group like a flash of light.

"Great Caesar! that hoss war a white one!" exclaimed Old Eclipse. "The boy's milky steed hez come back to Redeye, an'—"

"Hush! hyer comes a hull herd!"

The whole camp now rung with the noise of hoofs, and twenty horses followed in the white steed's wake.

Well might the men of Redeye shrink against the cabins and withhold their fire.

Every horse had a rider, and as they swept on after the magnificent quarry Old Eclipse and his companions scarcely breathed.

"Great God! whether them red devils catch White Rocket er not, they'll come back an' pay their respects to Redeye!" he ejaculated. "Thar they go—the meanest lot ov Injuns that ever stole a mustang er plundered a ranch. They hevn't time to stop now, but they'll come back, I say. Git ready ter meet 'em, men ov Redeye," and with the last word on his lips the old miner darted away.

He did not stop until he reached the open door of a certain cabin.

Darkness reigned inside.

"Blossom are ye thar?" asked Eclipse in anxious tones.

No answer was returned.

"Great serpents! what hez happened?"

He cleared the threshold at a bound and scraped a lucifer match across one of the logs.

The next moment a light flashed up in his face, and something that seemed to possess life struck his feet.

Instantly the burning match fell from his hand and he pounced upon the figure whose outlines he had just made out.

"It's the girl—Blossom!" he exclaimed. "In the name of Heaven, what hez happened?"

A gasp was the reply.

Old Eclipse seemed beside himself with excitement.

"Whar's the boy?"

"Gone!" murmured the girl.

"That suits me," said Eclipse. "May he never come back to Redeye! The young skunk hez p'isened my life fer twenty years ahead. But he didn't go off ov his own account; he warn't able."

"No; his horse came back. The white animal entered the hut, picked Snap Shot up with his teeth, an' knocked me over as he dashed away."

"Gewilliky crickets! what a boss," cried Old Eclipse. "Carried the boy cl'ar off, hey?"

"Yes; but what does that noise mean?"

"They're comin' back."

Blossom slid from her protector's hands as he moved toward the door.

She stole to his side and heard—what?

A thousand Indian yells and the thunder of hoofs!

The Apaches were coming back to Redeye.

CHAPTER X.

"WHO'S LIED—JACK OR PINKEYE?"

WHETHER or not the red raiders had captured White Rocket, Old Eclipse could not determine.

Certain he was that the Apaches were charging down upon the mountain town with the fury of a thousand demons.

"They'll not git through Redeye erlive—all ov 'em won't," said the old miner. "The boys I left in front ov Jerusalem's will empty a few saddles. Hyer they come! Now, look out, Blossom."

He stepped back from the door a pace, still holding to the girl's hand.

The next minute the red Bedouins of the Southwest border charged past, uttering yells that almost shook the cabins.

"Jehosaphat! what a herd!" ejaculated Old Eclipse. "Thar they go an' without the white hoss an' his boy pard. Whar ar' the men ov Redeye? Hev they fled like gophers to their holes?"

No, Eclipse, the Arizonians were net cowards when charged by such a whirlwind of savage fury.

All at once a thunderous volley replied to the wild yells; the doors of a furnace seemed to open before the Apaches!

Indians fell headlong and backward, uttering death cries, or dying without a groan.

They tumbled in every direction.

"Wipe out the stampedes, boys! No quarter to the red skunks ov the Southwest! Fer the bonor ov old Redeye, stand yer ground an' kill the rascals!"

These and other sentences rose above the mad shots the Arizonians poured into the half-naked ranks.

It was evident that the Apaches had not intended to attack the camp, that they only

thought to ride through it at the top of their speed, telling the men of Redeye with their tails that they were in the immediate neighborhood, and feared them not.

More than one horse-stealing Apache paid dearly for his foolish daring.

The front of the main body seemed to melt away before the fire of the mountain men. Horses dashed on riderless, or with dead riders clinging to their manes. Few Indians reached the ground.

The battle, if battle the attack can be called, for the Apaches did not reply to the deadly volleys, did not last over three minutes.

The Indians rushed on, fired at as long as a chamber remained unemptied, nor drew rein short of two miles from camp.

There they stopped and investigated the casualties.

The inspection was enough to sicken the heart of the bravest warrior.

More than one raider dropped from the horses when they stopped, and not over half of the band remained unhurt.

Instinctively the warriors turned their horses' heads toward Redeye again.

"Back to the den of the mountain serpents!" cried a stalwart Indian whose scalp-lock had been shot away. "Let the den be swept clean by the arms of the Apaches! Back to the new trail! When the sun comes up let him shine upon the place where the white lodges stood."

An eager shout answered these words.

"Don't be fools!" said a voice at this momentous juncture, and the Apaches started back as they found themselves confronted by a horseman who had just reined in his steed between them and Redeye. "Take your dead off and bury them, and thank your stars that the men of Redeye had to shoot by the light of the stars. *Caramba!* this lesson ought to teach you something."

The speaker wore a large sombrero, and the gold lace that brodered his jacket scintillated here and there in the starlight.

The animal he bestrode was a magnificent specimen of horse-flesh, and champed his bit while his rider addressed the astonished redskins.

"Spanish Jack!" ejaculated several Indians in good English. "Let Gold Lace look behind the warriors of the Apache nation."

"I see! The men of Redeye must have tumbled one half of your band," Spanish Jack said with a smile. "Now go back there on vengeance bent and they'll finish the work. Where's Red Flash?"

"The pale-face that took the white horse cut Red Flash deep with his knife."

"And killed him?"

"No! Red Flash is getting well in the mountain. He will live to pay the bowie-king back."

"He'll have to get up early if he wants to settle with Thunder Sam. If you are bound to go back to Redeye I won't stand in your way; but I tell you that it'll be the end of you all."

Spanish Jack drew his steed aside as he finished, and he pointed toward Redeye as he gazed into the Indians' faces.

"There's the road to Redeye!" he continued. "Santissima! I wouldn't give a moccasin for your chances if you ride back. Don't you think they're waiting for you?"

The effect of the Tiger's sudden appearance and his words was apparent. The boldest Indian seemed to shrink from the mining-camp; those who were most clamorous for vengeance were seen to draw back.

"Wait till Red Flash gets well," the white stampeder continued. "He wants the white horse again and he will lead you down the trail of vengeance. But go to Redeye now if you want to. By Jove! I'll ride behind just to see the fun."

That was enough. Spanish Jack's eyes twinkled with humor when he saw the red-skies shrink from the fray.

"They're going to exhibit good sense for once," he said to himself. "The men of Redeye wouldn't let a man escape. That's sensible; they're going to back out. I may have use for those very red devils one of these days," and with a look that expressed his satisfaction, Spanish Jack saw the Apaches go back sullenly to their dead.

From the back of his horse he saw them lift the corpses from the ground, and watched the whole band move off.

"If they wouldn't go down to Redeye I'm not going to back out," he said in audible tones. "I told Thunder Sam that I'd return his revol-

vers and I might as well fulfill my promise now as at another time. The Mountain Lodge is in ashes and the girl must be at Redeye. If the boy really escaped from the ropes I tied him with last night, why is he not there, too? Come, Monterey; we're going to Redeye."

It was dangerous for Spanish Jack to re-enter the place in which a few hours previous he had sent a ball through the head of Buckhorn Bill; but this thought probably never entered his head.

"I'm not going through Redeye like the Injuns did," he said. "I left the town faster than I wanted to when I was here last; this time I'm going to leave when I get ready if I have to face every revolver in the camp."

It was not to be expected that Redeye would be quiet so soon after the Apaches' charge down its main thoroughfare.

Its denizens would be on the watch with their fingers at the trigger and the first enemy to show himself would in all likelihood receive a bullet in his head.

As if anxious to reconnoiter without subjecting himself to too great a danger, Spanish Jack slid from the saddle fifty yards from the last cabin in the western suburbs of Redeye and crept forward on foot.

He carried in his hand the ready revolver of the border.

From hut to hut he glided, now walking erect and now sneaking forward like a prowling spy.

His well known sombrero hung from the pomel of the saddle he had left behind, and his long black hair almost covered his broad shoulders.

He reached the middle of the camp unperceived and leaned against the logs of a certain cabin with an expression of victory on his handsome yellow face.

"What wouldn't them fellows down yonder give to know that Spanish Jack is in Redeye?" he murmured as sounds of human voices reached his ears from a spot on the other side of the street diagonally opposite his halting-place. "If I warn't here on a bi' of business, *santido!* but I'd have some rough sport. There goes that loud-mouth ranter off again! What does he say?"

The Tiger of Arizona leaned forward and listened with much interest.

"Thar's a meaner skunk in this kentry than Red Flash!" came to Spanish Jack's ears in coarse, mad tones. "You kin rake Arizona with a fine-tooth comb ef thar war sich a thing in the territory, an' you wouldn't turn up a blacker devil than Spanish Jack. He's led them very Injuns time an' ag'in, an' nobody knows it better than the pards ov Redeye. Thunder Sam an' the boys what went off to avenge Buckhorn Bill will never catch the gold-laced Greaser. He said he'd return Thunder's revolvers, but he lied. He's a coward when he's pushed to the wall. He's nothin' but a common hoss-thief, who sw'ars in Spanish an' does nothin' fair in American. I've hed my say. I hate Spanish Jack worse than I hate the Injuns, fer Bill an' I used to be pards. It's a pity the yaller dog isn't hyer to hear Pinkeye's opinion ov him."

The Tiger of Arizona could not see the speaker far from the group he had just addressed, but his quick ears told him that he was approaching.

Spanish Jack put up his revolver and drew a bowie.

With the gliding movements of a tiger, he moved toward the front of the log shanty and hugged the wall.

"I'll show Redeye that you're a liar, Pinkeye!" he hissed. "The man who swears in Spanish is nearer than you think!"

On came the man who had just denounced the stampeder in such unmeasured terms.

To Spanish Jack's joy, he came straight toward the hut.

All at once the man with the bowie shot forward.

"Halt!" he hissed. "Who's the liar, Pinkeye?"

Pinkeye recoiled.

"Great God! it is Spanish Jack himself!"

"No—the Tiger of Arizona, and the Tiger w'nts your blood!"

The hand that darted at the miner caught the arm that moved toward a revolver already cocked, and the starlight gleamed on the bright blade that shot upward.

A second did not intervene between this action and the terrible downward stroke.

"I swear in Spanish, Pinkeye, but my bowie knows but one word—death!" grated the Tiger.

With a half-stifled groan Pinkeye reeled away, but Spanish Jack's left hand held him up.

"You're going back to your comrades," he said to the man already dead. "By Heaven! I'll show the men of Redeye that the man you've just called 'coward' is not such a coward after all."

A terrible frenzy seemed to have taken possession of the Arizonian Tiger, and starting forward with the strength of a lion, he dragged his victim after him.

His teeth were heard to grate harshly, as he crossed the space that intervened between the cabin and the group of rough men, who were revealed by the light that streamed through the open door of Redeye's main saloon. His eyes glittered like a serpent's; he was bent on mischief.

Suddenly he brought up before the group, which he took in with a single glance.

"I've brought Pinkeye back, men of Redeye!" he suddenly exclaimed, as he jerked the dead miner's lithe figure from the ground and poised him above his head. "Thar he is! He called me a coward a minute ago. Let the bowie in his heart make him out a liar if it will!"

With the second sentence the corpse of Pinkeye was sent into the midst of the breathless group with all the power that Spanish Jack could summon to his aid.

The miners were buried back with weapons half-drawn, and the human thunderbolt struck the ground with a dull thud.

"Thar's Pinkeye!" thundered the stampeder. "Who's the liar—him or Jack?"

At the edge of the light from the saloon stood the splendid figure of the Arizonian Tiger, and in each hand thrust forward glittered the barrel of a huge seven-shooter.

"Answer my question!" he continued sternly. "I came to Redeye on business, but I never shrunk from a sport like this. Look at Pinkeye and then photograph Spanish Jack with your eyes. Who's lied—Jack or Pinkeye?"

The question answered itself.

The man who towered like a giant in front of that almost pallid collection of roughs with death, in his outstretched hands was the living refutation of Pinkeye's charge.

"You hevn't lied—that's sartin!" said one of the group at last. "But do you expect to git out ov Redeye alive, Spanish?"

"I do, and I will!" was the quick response, and the next second the roughs of Redeye were staggering from the deadly weapons of the Tiger of Arizona.

He moved back as he shot; but he killed all the same!

Such a terrible visitor had never penetrated the camp before.

He was worse than the Apaches.

CHAPTER XI.

MISSING HIS CHANCE.

"WHAT does all that shootin' mean? One man's doin' it all as any fool kin tell. In the name ov thunder, who's come to Redeye?"

The speaker stood on a mountain-trail whose rocks were elevated several hundred feet above the ground on which Redeye was built.

He held a horse by the bridle-rein as if he had dismounted because of the roughness of the road and he was listening intently to the shots that rung out in startling succession on the night air.

Once or twice he thought he saw the flashes of the deadly revolvers, but the lights were far away and might be fire-flies.

"I said I wouldn't go back to the camp until I could ride White Rocket through it, didn't I?" he went on after a moment's pause. "I've a notion to break that promise an' go down thar an' see what's goin' on. Snap Shot—curse his o'neye picter!—euchered me out ov the white hoss an' I mustn't think ov recoverin' the animal to-night. This Injun critter is good enough till I kin git a better one. Thet other hoss shall be White Rocket as sure as my name is Thunder Sam."

The man on the mountain did not listen a moment longer.

Redeye lay at his feet as it were, at the foot of a trail hardly fit for a horse to travel, but Thunder Sam did not hesitate.

Down he went, still gripping the leatheren bridle, and with his weather-beaten face constantly turned toward camp.

"I hope they'll keep it up 'till I kin take a hand in the game," fell from his lips. "Hang me! ef I ain't sp'ilin' fer a fight, an' hev been ever since the boy got his hoss back."

All at once a wild, triumphant cheer echoed far and wide.

The mad shots grew still.

"Jehosaphat! I'm too late," said the desperado, halting for a moment. "Arter sech shootin' as that I'd think that'd be a dozen funerals in Redeye. That goes that cheer ag'in! The feller what gave it came out on top."

While he uttered the last sentence, Thunder Sam resumed his journey; he pushed on faster than before.

A strange stillness brooded over the camp when he entered it at the end nearest the mountains; but voices suddenly struck the desperado's ears.

"Somebody's alive, anyhow," he ejaculated with a grin. "I'll know in a minute or two who did all that terrible pepperin'."

Continuing on, he passed between two cabins, and came suddenly upon a scene revealed by a torch one end of which was sticking in the ground.

He saw the moving figures of men dressed like himself, and recognized those whom he had left in possession of Redeye.

"Who did all that?" queried Thunder Sam halting, and fixing his gaze on a number of human figures that occupied various positions suggestive of death on the ground.

His question was followed by instant recognition and without being answered, Thunder Sam found himself surrounded by the mountain roughs.

"You've seen me afore, boys," he exclaimed. "I asked a question awhile ago. Who wiped the boys out to-night?"

"The only man in Arizona who could do it an' git away," was the reply. "He came like a ghost, but armed to the teeth, an' went off like a whirlwind. You know him now, Thunder."

The desperado ground his teeth.

"Did he do it wi h the men-killers he took from me last night?" he asked.

"He did."

"Then, by George! he shall pay for it!"

"You've said that afore, Thunder Sam."

"That I did, an' I'll make it stronger by sayin' it ag'in! He got away!"

"All Arizony couldn't hav corralled such a devil. Why, he worked yer shooters as if all he had to do war to pull trigger. Jerusalem! what shots he made! That isn't a man among the ten what hez a ball between his peepers. Yes, sir, he got away; may I be hanged, Thunder, ef he ever missed a shot. Old Eclipse says—"

"Old Eclipse?" echoed Thunder Sam. "Where is Old Eclipse?"

"Hyer I am!"

Thunder Sam laid his hand on his revolver as he wheeled upon the man who had spoken in language not to be misunderstood.

"You did come back, didn't you?" queried Eclipse, coming forward entirely unarmed, but with a quivering finger covering the man he addressed. "Thar you stand, Thunder Sam, arter tryin' to rob Redeye ov Old Eclipse. Oh, you white-livered catamount, you ought to larn to shoot better arter dark. Stand off, boys, an' look at the meanest man in Redeye—the man what shoots the pard hez bunched with, the pard what dragged him ten miles through the Colorado snow-drifts to save his life. Such a man is Thunder Sam! Lay hands on him, fer I won't touch 'im. Awhile ago I wanted 'im to come back to Redeye to spill his blood an' scatter his brains; now I turn 'im over to the men he hez disgraced by tryin' to kill a pard. We'd hang a dog fer doin' less than he's done. What will you do with Thunder Sam, men ov Redeye?"

Old Eclipse's words cut to the bone, and not a movement was made until the last one had been spoken, and the outstretched arm fell again to its owner's side.

"He's a mean liar!" roared Thunder Sam, starting toward his accuser, his face dark as a thunder-cloud. "I answer his charges with my revolver. Stand back an' give me a fair show. This time I will not fail!"

But the maddened desperado was not allowed to carry out his threat.

Several men threw themselves upon him, and Old Eclipse-men, who feared not the formidable revolver clutched in his bronzed hand nor the explosions of his rage.

A bitter laugh rung from Eclipse's lips as Thunder Sam was hurled back, and, despite his resistance, deprived of his weapon and entirely disarmed.

"I thought this war Redeye," the villain grated.

"It's no other place," answered Eclipse, quietly. "I'm goin' to give you a chance fer yer life, Thunder, though that's more than you

gave me last night. Arizony is a big place, but it's too small fer us. Bring Blossom hyer."

Thunder Sam's eyes dilated.

"I am here already," said a girlish voice, at his right hand, and he saw near by the beautiful creature whom he had sworn to win.

She never looked more beautiful than when she stood in the glare of the torch with her eyes riveted upon Old Eclipse waiting for his commands since he had called her.

"You've forgiven her, hevn't you?" said Sam, glancing at the old miner.

"Forgiven her for what?"

"For lovin' the young skunk who came up from the south to hunt up his horse."

Blossom's face crimsoned.

"A lie made up on the spur of the moment is as good as one studied out!" she cried, advancing upon Thunder Sam whom she regarded with a pair of flashing eyes. "You can't turn Old Eclipse against me, Thunder Sam. You don't know what has passed between us since sundown."

A cold sneer curled the desperado's lips.

"Ohol lie it out ef it'll do you any good," he said, half under his breath, then turned to his enemy again. "Whar's that chance you war jes' talkin' about?"

Without replying Old Eclipse brought the girl to his side with a look and bent over her.

"The ropes in the shanty, Blossom—I want them," he said, in a whisper, and the girl started off.

Three minutes later she reappeared on the scene with several strong ropes of good length which Old Eclipse took from her hand with a smile of satisfaction.

"Hyer, Big Hand!" he said, tossing the cords to a stalwart fellow who stood near by. "Fix Thunder an' me like you fixed me an' the half breed chief that time on the Rio Grande."

"That's no fair way ov fightin'!" vociferated Thunder Sam, recoiling despite the cordon of swarthy men by whom he was completely surrounded. "I've heard ov yer tussle with Yellow Jim. I won't fight that way."

"It's givin' you a chance, Thunder."

"A blamed slim one!" and the speaker's eye wandered over the crowd that listened.

"Tie us, Big Hand," said Old Eclipse. "That mountain coyote hed his way last night, I'm goin' to hev mine now."

At a sign from the man called Big Hand the circle contracted and Old Eclipse stepped forward, and placed his right leg alongside of Thunder Sam's left.

"Tie us to one another from the knee down. Now, go to work, Big Hand."

The man with the ropes stooped to perform his task.

"You want me to think, Eclipse, that you're givin' me the advantage by offering me yer right leg," said Sam, catching the old miner's glance. "Don't I know that yer left hand is jes' ez good ez yer right when it comes to handlin' the bowie? But I'll fight you! This is Redeye, an' I'm not Yellow Jim!"

The work of uniting the two men progressed rapidly, and was completed in a few minutes.

When Big Hand rose and stepped back, it was to announce that the duel could begin.

"The bowies now," said Eclipse.

Several were drawn and thrust forward.

"Take yer choice, Thunder," said the miner. Thunder Sam selected one, and straightened up.

"Hold the torch in front ov us—that. Now ar' you ready, Thunder?"

"I am ready. Give the signal!"

The next instant Old Eclipse burst into a loud laugh that sounded strangely at that time and place.

Thunder Sam's eyes stared at the laughter, but his lips did not move.

"I'm no fool, Thunder Sam," said Old Eclipse, becoming serious in a moment. "I only wanted to see how eager you war to wipe me out arter failin' last night—that's all. Hyer go the ropes! Look out fer yer leg."

Old Eclipse stooped before the astonished desperado could recover from his astonishment, and in another instant he stepped back, freed by a bowie.

"You've got to die like a dog!" he cried, addressing Thunder Sam. "I've given you all the chance you shall have. Why didn't you give me the bowie while I warcuttin' the cords? That war yer chance, Thunder. Now a limb an' a rope shall deprive Redeye ov another citizen. You war a fool fer comin' back hyer."

"A fool? Yes, an' etarnal fool!" grated Thunder Sam. "I missed my opportunity, an' I ought ter die fer doin' it. Men ov Redeye, do yer duty!"

CHAPTER XII.

FOR LIFE AND A HORSE.

WHILE the events just recorded were transpiring at Redeye, the white horse that had entered Old Eclipse's cabin and jerked Snap Shot from the rough cot on the floor, was plunging madly along an uncouth road with the boy no longer hanging from his mouth, but clinging for dear life to his flowing mane.

Blossom's brief account of the singular abduction was the true one; bu' Snap Shot could not realize fully what had happened until he found himself a long distance from the camp and the prisoner of his own steed.

Weakened by the wound received at Old Eclipse's bands, the young horse-hunter with difficulty changed his situation when the animal stopped for a breathing-spell; and when White Rocket resumed his flight the boy was on his back.

The speed of the white horse had left the Apaches far behind. They had turned back to charge through Redeye, and to encounter the deadly revolvers of the roughs of Arizona.

Need we say that a thrill of joy shot through Snap Shot's heart when he realized that he actually bestrode his gallant horse again?

More than once, forgetful of his wound, he vowed that they should not be separated any more.

His thoughts went back to the girl he had been forced to leave behind, and to her jealous guardian, who had sworn that for a man to love Blossom was to seal his own doom.

The thought of Eclipse heated the horse-hunter's blood; it sent needle-like arrows through his wound.

"Until this moment I have thought but little of trying to win Blossom," he exclaimed; "but now—now, old madman, I am going to inaugurate a new campaign. I have recovered White Rocket and now I am going to fight for the mountain rose. I give you fair warning of my intention, Eclipse. I would proclaim it boldly were you here at this moment. My campaign in this country has but just begun."

Little Snap Shot did not notice whither the horse was carrying him, so busy was he with his thoughts.

The yells of the Apaches had long since died away, and White Rocket was slowly traversing a trail dimly revealed by the stars that glittered overhead.

Suddenly the horse stopped and elevated the tips of his creamy ears.

The halt at once roused the boy, and he thought of his helpless condition, helpless because he was unarmed, and in a part of the country which he believed he had never penetrated before.

Stock-still in the lonely trail stood the horse, with neck craned forward and head slightly turned to one side, while his nostrils occasionally snuffed the air.

"I see nothing, Rocket," said Snap Shot in low tones, after several minutes had passed. "What excites you, old fellow? Your eyes and ears are better than mine; but what is the matter now?"

White Rocket moved backward as though a serpent, the horse's dread, was creeping forward, and the youth strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the cause of the steed's subdued excitement.

At last the danger seemed to have been passed, for White Rocket had started on once more.

"My wound—oh! there it goes again!" was suddenly forced from Snap Shot's lips. "It has reminded me of Old Eclipse's attempt at murder." And he ground his teeth. "Find me a soft place near the trail, Rocket, where I can lie down and hold the bridle while I sleep. I must have rest. Your fright has excited me. I thought I would keep cool, but—"

The horse had stopped again, this time at what seemed to be the mouth of a cave at one side of the trail.

"A shelter for me so soon?" exclaimed Snap Shot joyously. "I will accept it, and thank fortune besides."

He lowered himself to the ground as gently as possible, and almost shouted for joy when he found himself on a carpet of soft grass that seemed to invite his pain-racked limbs.

Without inquiring into the depth of the opening in the hillside, he drew the bridle-rein over White Rocket's head, and at once composed his limbs in the opening for a short rest on the carpet of green.

The faithful horse stood sentry over his young master, having placed himself between him and the trail, and the stars looked down upon one of the oddest tableaux they had ever seen.

Consciousness left Little Snap Shot almost as soon as his head touched the grass; but he retained his hold on the rein, and enjoyed the deep slumber that closed his eyes.

If he had possessed the wakeful nature of the nighthawk and the keen eyes of that bird, instead of sleeping at the mouth of the little hole in the hill, he might have left his couch with an exclamation of horror.

Creeping upon him through the stygian gloom of that mountain retreat was a being that had the eyes of the panther, though the figure of a man.

The crawl was accompanied by no noise, and although the object dragged itself over the ground with a painful movement, it advanced with the certainty of fate toward Snap Shot.

White Rocket suddenly pricked up his ears, and drawing back a few inches, removed the rein from the sleeper's half-open hand.

What did the horse see?

Stooping over Snap Shot was a half-naked and gaunt Apache Indian, the ogre of the mountain cave, and, without doubt, the young horse-hunter's evil genius!

The two eyes of the savage blazed like globes of fire, and seemed to devour the youth with mad intensity.

For a moment he hung over the horse-hunter, then started and fixed his flashing orbs on the horse, regarding him with equine astonishment.

"White boy an' his horse come to Red Flash!" muttered the red lips. "The Great Spirit bring the snow horse back after the pale wild-cat cut Red Flash, an' rode off on his back."

Red Flash!

Here, then, was the Apache chief to whom Snap Shot owed all his misfortunes, the great red-skin who had taken White Rocket from the grama pastures of the old ranch, and transferred him to other scenes; the Indian from whom Thunder Sam wrenched the coveted prize the night of the destruction of Blossom's cabin home, and the leader of the red-men who had charged through Red-eye!

Left in the cavern to recover from the wound received from Thunder Sam's bowie, while his followers hunted revenge and the white steed, fate had brought White Rocket and his true owner to his very door.

Is it a wonder that the Apache's eyes blaze?

Here was victory unexpected, triumph of which he had never dreamed.

Red Flash cared more for the white steed which stood before him once more; when he recognized the animal his red right hand moved eagerly toward the bridle.

But the horse uttered a snort and shrank away.

"The snow horse shall not escape Red Flash if the Apache does carry the pale-face's knife-mark on his body!" exclaimed the Indian. "The chief of the red warriors will ride him toward the sunrise land, an' there let his wound heal."

Red Flash sprung up and leaped across the sleeping boy.

A wild cry broke from his throat as he darted at the bridle rein.

He clutched it with a hand that burned with eagerness, and clung to it despite White Rocket's wild attempts to break away.

"The white horse is for Red Flash! He will ride him at the head of his tribe. On the war-trail an' the raid, he will lead the swift horses of the Apache braves."

The struggle for the mastery between the Indian and the horse roused the youth.

In an instant he was on his feet and seemed to take in the situation at a glance.

"Back, pale boy!" shouted Red Flash, as Snap Shot started forward, forgetful of his unarmed condition. "He will die under the white horse's feet if he touches Red Flash. Back, white rider!"

"Never! the horse is mine, mean dog. You may be Red Flash himself. If so, I am glad that we have met. Look out for your throat, red devil!"

Snap Shot's eager spring made the Indian turn in self-defense; but his left hand would not relinquish the captured bridle.

The horse was too precious a prize to be surrendered without a desperate fight.

The horse-hunter's bound cleared the space that intervened between him and the red horse-thief.

He clutched vengefully at Red Flash's throat, but was thrown off, and reeled toward the mouth of the cavern.

"You don't get rid of me thus!" he cried, recovering in an instant, and before the Apache chief could turn his attention to the horse again.

"My life-blood is not dearer to me than White

Rocket. It'll be an endless day when you can call yourself his master."

Snap Shot threw himself forward again, this time determined to end the contest in some manner.

"Zip! zip!" he cried to the horse, and the next moment the animal sprung toward him despite the opposing chief who was dashed aside and almost trampled under foot.

A mad yell rose from the Apache's throat for he had been forced to relinquish his hold on the bridle-rein in order to escape death or injury.

"Pale boy die now!" he cried.

"We shall see!" answered Snap Shot, bracing himself for the Indian's charge.

Separated from the horse, Red Flash came down upon his brave young antagonist with uplifted hunting-knife.

"White horse shall carry the Apache chief!" he vociferated. "In the mountain trail he will leave the pale boy, for the winged wolves of the skies!"

Ere the two foes could meet a living thunderbolt dashed between.

It was the horse himself!

Struck by the plunging steed, Red Flash was forced aside, and sent reeling away, with the bloodless knife falling from his hand.

Snap Shot fared but little better, for he, too, was hurled back, and tripping on a loose stone, went to the ground.

All this in the twinkling of an eye.

For some moments after the white steed's intervention, all was still.

The horse turned after performing the deed, and seemed to enjoy his work.

Red Flash picked himself up with a growl, and ran his eyes over the battle-ground.

"He wants his knife," passed through Snap Shot's mind, and at that moment catching sight of an object that glittered in the starlight, he pounced eagerly upon it.

At that same instant the Indian saw it also.

There was a leap on the part of each, and the two foes—red and white—met over the coveted blade.

"It is not for you, red thief!" cried Little Snap Shot, placing his foot on the knife, and darting madly at the Apache, who was forced to recoil. "Now, come on and let us decide the battle for the best horse in Arizona!"

Well might the horse-hunter throw this challenge into the teeth of the foe; his right hand clutched the prize of the battle—the knife of the Apache.

CHAPTER XIII.

SPANISH JACK'S VICTORY.

RED FLASH was not disposed to disregard the challenge.

He sprung with a yell straight at the horse-hunter.

This time White Rocket did not interfere.

There was a blow, a half-stifled ejaculation of rage, and the well-matched enemies collide.

Red Flash's arms were thrown round the youth; he grated his teeth like a dying man as he lifted him from the ground, and started toward the mouth of the cavern.

Had Little Snap Shot's stroke failed?

The infuriated Apache, still hugging his enemy to his breast, disappeared beyond the forbidding threshold.

The white horse sprung forward as if bent on his master's rescue; but the Indian had been too quick for him; no horse could enter the cave!

Like one who knew the dark trails of the cavern, Red Flash pressed on with teeth firm set and eyes that fairly flashed, but no longer with the look they had once borne.

He turned suddenly to the right, and came upon the glare of a fire which, burning on the floor of the cavern, illuminated an apartment of good dimensions.

"Down to where the serpents hiss in the darkness!" fell from his lips. "Red Flash will yet ride the snow horse at the head of his warrior band! The knife of the pale boy is in his breast, but the Great Spirit will make Red Flash strong again!"

Snap Shot felt himself being borne forward swiftly, but with a certain unsteadiness of gait.

He could not wrench himself from the grasp of the red demon that clutched him.

His only hope was that death would seize Red Flash before he could carry out his dread purpose, whatever it was.

But the Indian's vitality fought like a lion against death.

Suddenly Snap Shot felt the hands of his foe

tear him away, and then in the light of the fire he caught a glimpse of an opening in the ground.

A horrible shudder ran over his frame as the Indian's terrible intentions flashed across his brain.

"White boy find the poison snakes in their dens. Red Flash will then go back to the snow horse he took from the grama grass where the sun shines hot!"

Little Snap Shot made a desperate effort to break from the chief's grasp, but there was no escape.

With his breath leaving him in gasps, Red Flash held his victim over the gaping pit, which, to the boy horse-hunter, looked like the chasm of doom.

Twenty seconds followed Red Flash's last words, and then Snap Shot felt himself falling through darkness and space.

His brain was active for one awful moment; he heard the triumphant ejaculation of his arch enemy like the laugh of a devil incarnate, and then down—down toward the bottom of that snake-infested pit.

Red Flash leaned over the edge of the hole and listened for a moment; then he went back to the fire and drew out a torch.

A moment later he threw it down the opening, and watched it descend like a fiery arrow until it struck, apparently a thousand feet below, and sent upward a shower of sparks!

Satisfied with his victory, Red Flash turned away and moved toward the mouth of the cavern.

Eagerness carried him forward with mad bounds, and an exclamation left his lips when his gaze fell upon the horse that waited for his young master in the starlight.

"The snow horse is Red Flash's forever!"

White Rocket tried to avoid the red-skin, but the Apache was too quick for him, and with a cry of triumph that went echoing over the hills, he threw himself into the saddle and turned the horse's head toward the east!

It was Red Flash's victory!

Urged from the spot by the rider, whom he vainly tried to shake off, White Rocket shot arrow-like down the trail.

He seemed to strain every nerve, and soon threw out proof that he was "the best horse in Arizona."

The cave and its prisoner were left behind in a flash; the stars caught glimpses of the white horse that followed that winding trail with the ease that a horse follows a straight one at noon-day.

On, on! Was there to be no rest for the swift-footed prize?

Red Flash no longer sat upright in the saddle, but lay forward on the animal's heated neck with one red hand clutching the bridle-rein, and the other in the mane.

There was a dark stain on White Rocket's left fore-shoulder; some of the silver hairs of the mane were glued to the shoulder by a crimson glue!

"Halt!" rung suddenly out in distinct tones, but Red Flash paid no attention to the command.

On, on went the white steed as though flying from a thousand enemies.

"Caramba! it's White Rocket!" and the speaker lowered his revolver, and wheeling his steed darted after the horse which had passed him like a Pawnee arrow.

All at once Red Flash stirred but could not raise himself in the saddle.

He turned his head, however, and heard the hoofs that thundered behind him—heard them, and added a new light to his glazing eyes.

He tried to rein White Rocket in, but his arm seemed too feeble for the task; the horse carried him on now despite his wishes.

"On, snow steed, then!" he cried. "Carry Red Flash to the trails which the hawk's eye cannot see. He will ride you at the head of the Apache nation again!"

That desire always uppermost in the red chief's mind now seemed the only one that urged him on.

He threw himself forward on the horse's neck, and the dark stains on the white skin grew moist again.

Red Flash saw them glisten in the brilliant starlight, and gritted his teeth.

Well did he know that it was the best blood of the bravest chief of the Apache nation.

Suddenly the red hand was jerked from among the silver mane, the chief's body tottered to one side, his other hand left the bridle, and a moment later White Rocket was riderless.

With nostrils distended, and glazing eyeballs,

the horse rushed on, carrying deeper into the mountains the blood-stains on his glossy coat.

Across the narrow trail lay the body of the Indian who had ridden thousands of miles, and risked his life for him.

The good eyes reflected in their depths the stars that glittered overhead.

He heard not the steed that galloped from the west, nor saw the careering horse that sprung over him and bore his rider on after White Rocket.

This last horse was ridden by a man whose sombrero was thrown back by the wind, and whose dark hair floated behind him like the pennant of a pirate craft.

He plied his spurs madly and without cessation; his whole heart was wrapped up in the chase.

"Now or never!" he exclaimed. "On the back of that white steed I can laugh at the men of Redeye. *Santissima!* but didn't they stagger from my men-killers to-night? It cost them eleven men to learn that Pinkeye lived! Aha! Spanish Jack is yet master of the situation."

The man was the Tiger of Arizona.

His spurs were bloody and his face was hot.

The horse he rode seemed to know what was wanted of him, for he stretched away against the night wind with incredible speed.

At last the race—the wildest one those old hills had yet seen—terminated.

Spanish Jack sent up a shout of triumph.

A horse panting heavily, but with eye un-dimmed, was waiting for him on the trail.

The gold-laced desperado leaned forward exultingly, and his tawny hand clutched the foamy rein.

"At last!" he cried. "By heavens! I'd sooner possess this animal than rule the world! A cheer for the victory of Spanish Jack!" and up went the big sombrero.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MOMENTARY TRIUMPH.

"CAN it be that my horse-hunt is to end miserably in this horrid place? I will not believe it! Fortune did not bring me into this country to desert me here with Red Flash the victor. I will escape to settle with that red-skin the next time we meet. Ah! the torch that shot past me awhile ago has gone out, but the fire in the cavern up yonder still burns."

Little Snap Shot, the speaker, was in a perilous position.

His surroundings were dark and gloomy; he could not see his hand when placed in front of his face, but some distance overhead he saw the feeble glow of a fire.

Red Flash had intended that he should be hurled headlong to the bottom of the old shaft in the cave; but fate as if determined to baffle the mad Apache, had interfered strangely in the youth's behalf.

At one day, many years perhaps anterior to the date of our story, a platform was built for some purpose in the shaft. It was about fifty feet from the top. The planks had almost rotated away, and a portion of Snap Shot's body had fallen through.

If the young horse-hunter had not thrown out his hands and buried them in the soft wood, he would have descended through the gap to a death too horrible to contemplate.

Through this gap Red Flash's torch went with a hiss, thus deceiving the Indian as to Snap Shot's fate, and leaving the boy to hold his breath and move not until his enemy's departure.

Perish in that old shaft after being miraculously saved by the decaying platform, he would not!

There was a trail before him which he would follow to the end, despite the wound inflicted by Old Eclipse at Redeye, a hurt which, strange to say, did not pain him now.

He tested the strength of the old planks before he attempted to ascend to the cave above.

"My horse has been lost again," he said to himself. "I have sworn to ride him back to the old ranch and I shall. I can forgive Eclipse his shot; but Red Flash his work, never!"

Eager to escape, now that he knew that his red foe had departed, Little Snap Shot felt the dark sides of the shaft.

Suddenly an exclamation of discovery escaped him; his fingers had found a niche in the wall.

"Some unfortunate has been imprisoned here before me," he said. "He possessed a knife which I do not, and he cut a path to the top of the shaft. A thousand thanks, my unknown friend!" And the horse-hunter at once began to put his discovery to good use.

The ascent was toilsome and extremely dangerous; to fall back might be to dart through the gap underneath, and die at last at the bottom of the shaft.

But Little Snap Shot's courage was equal to the emergency.

At length his hands rested on the edge of that loathsome pit, and then he joyfully drew his body out, to sink exhausted in the light of the dying fire.

"Saved!" he ejaculated. "Now look out, Red Flash, if you still live! My horse shall be found! I am going to keep my oath to the letter!"

The young Arizonian went forward to the opening of the cavern, to the spot where he and the Apache chief had battled for the mastery.

Not a sound now disturbed the stillness of the bewitching night.

White Rocket, the horse, was nowhere to be seen, and Red Flash in departing had left no visible trail.

For a long time Snap Shot stood leaning against the wall of the cave at its mouth, the only living person on the spot.

"One must have arms to cope successfully with his enemies in Arizona!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I came to this place weaponless, and I am in the same condition now. If Red Flash was left here by his warriors, he must have had more arms than a knife. I will see if the cave cannot arm me."

He went back into the cavern and took a burning stick from the fire. He was going to search the place for Red Flash's weapons.

The hunt terminated abruptly over a dirty couch composed of several blankets.

The butt of a revolver protruded from beneath them.

Little Snap Shot pounced upon the find with an exclamation of joy.

"See what fortune does for a fellow when he deserves help!" and he went toward the fire again. "I want no better ally than this weapon. With it in my hands I feel able to cope with the whole Apache nation."

Red Flash, in his eagerness to catch the white horse, had forgotten the formidable weapon under the couch.

He might have thought of it since, but it was when White Rocket was bearing him swiftly from the spot, and when Spanish Jack was thundering in his rear.

Thus armed by fate, Snap Shot went to the opening again and mounted guard.

The night air was not cold, but there was a certain loneliness around him that was not calculated to give a buoyancy to his spirits.

Once or twice he fell into a light doze, from which he roused himself, and at last saw the dawn of another day.

He had a right to wonder what had happened at Redeye since his departure.

Blossom would wonder whither White Rocket had borne him, and whether the pursuing Apaches had not overtaken the white steed and his master.

Snap Shot knew nothing about the slaughter of the red-skins by the men of Redeye; nothing of Spanish Jack's terrible visit to the camp, and nothing, either, of Thunder Sam's return and his apprehension by his former comrades at Old Eclipse's command.

These were events of which the young horse-hunter knew nothing; they had taken place during the brief interval of time that had elapsed since his strange abduction from the camp.

In the flush of morning he leaned toward the trail and scanned it closely.

Something seemed to tell him that it could not remain deserted long.

The Apaches might be expected at the cave at any time, and if Spanish Jack was still in the country, why might he not come?

"Heavens!" suddenly exclaimed the horse-hunter; "I have not looked nor wished in vain;" and he drew back quickly at sight of the object which had come in view.

"I expect no friend here, therefore I must be prepared," he continued, looking to the condition of the revolver firmly clutched in his right hand.

A minute showed him the outlines of a horse advancing from toward Redeye, and he shrank to the mouth of the cavern with burning eyes.

Another minute wore away; he heard the sound of hoofs on the flinty trail; the horse and his rider were very near.

Little Snap Shot waited until he saw the steed's nostrils; then he sprung forward.

"Halt or die!" rung sternly from his lips.

A startling cry was the quick response, and the revolver leveled at the rider instantly fell.

"Blossom! thank Heaven!" and Snap Shot went forward with joy beaming in his eyes.

"You still live—I am glad of that!" responded the fair young creature, who leaned from the saddle with her eyes fixed on the astonished youth. "I did not know what had become of you, and I feared the worst. Your horse came and left like a thunderbolt last night, but when the Indians came back without you, I knew that you had eluded them. Ah! terrible events have taken place in Redeye since then."

"Tell me," said Snap Shot eagerly.

He stood at the horse's side looking up into Blossom's face.

Without hesitating, Old Eclipse's *protégée* proceeded to narrate the events we have already witnessed; Snap Shot listened like a person amazed.

"The climax was reached when Thunder Sam came back," said the girl. "In less than twenty minutes there was a noose about his neck, and they marched him to the big tree at the edge of the camp. They were going to hang him for shooting Old Eclipse down without mercy."

"That was right!"

Blossom smiled.

"The meanest wolf in the pack has friends," she went on. "It was so with Thunder Sam. His hands were tied on his back, but that did not prevent his escape."

"The devil got away, then?"

"He got clear off, I am sorry to say. Just as Big Hand was about to give the signal to pull Thunder Sam up, a friend cut his bonds and thrust a revolver into his hand. He jerked the noose from his neck himself, leaped back, covered his astonished foes for a second, then went off like a deer. All this was done in a second of time it seemed to me. Need I say that Eclipse and his friends raved? I never witnessed such a scene at Redeye; the men acted like demons. Of course they followed Thunder Sam, but nobody knows this country better than he does. He got away, but sent back words of defiance and a shout of victory. Eclipse will hunt him down; he swore to do it under the tree on which Thunder Sam was to have been hanged."

Little Snap Shot did not speak for a moment.

"I believe I owe that mountain rough a debt which I am not loth to pay," he said. "I am rather glad that Thunder Sam got away, for it will enable me to cancel my obligations to him."

"Hyer's another pard what's jes' as glad, Snap Shot," said a rough voice.

Blossom instantly raised her head, and the young horse-hunter wheeled with a light cry of surprise.

"Oh, don't lift that shooter, my young holly-hock," continued the same voice. "Ef I hevn't got the dead drop on ye I never hed it on a living man!"

Blossom's cheeks paled, for the speaker was Thunder Sam himself.

CHAPTER XV.

THUNDER SAM'S DOOM.

In the most startling manner had Blossom's account of Thunder Sam's escape from the roughs of Redeye been confirmed.

There seemed no escape from the revolver that covered the young couple on the mountain trail.

The bloodshot eyes that glared like a tiger's behind the weapon possessed no spark of mercy.

"I guess I'm worth a dozen banded men, eh?" cried Thunder Sam. "Didn't think I war in these parts jes' at this time I guess. Wal, I wouldn't be ef Old Eclipse an' his pards had had it all their own way last night. It's jes' as you've said, Blossom: the meanest wolf ov the pack is not without friends," and the last words were supplemented with a wild laugh. "I don't see any thing ov the white hoss you forced from me the last time we met," continued the mountain desperado, addressing Snap Shot. "Did some chap turn the tables an' relieve you ov the critter? Things ar' liable to happen thet way in Arizony! Do you know, my young rosebud, thet when I go back to Redeye I'll ride that animile?"

"You'll never ride him if you grant me fair play in this affair of ours," said Snap Shot firmly.

"A chance fer yer life, hey?"

"If you call fair play a chance, yes."

"Thet's what Old Eclipse said he war goin' to give me last night, but when Big Hand hed tied our legs together, the old liar backed out an' turned me over to the rope. Now you want me to give you fair play, which means the dead

drop on Thunder Sam. What do you say, girl?"

Blossom's eyes flashed and her cheeks colored.

"He asks for what you never gave any one!" she cried. "He appeals to one who never granted fair play to an enemy. You shot Old Eclipse down in cold blood, and the failure to kill is no fault of yours. Touch the trigger you hold at your command and a new avenger will step upon your trail."

"Thet means you, I suppose," sneered the mountain rough.

"Shoot and see!"

"Thet's jes' what I'll do, my daisy."

Thunder Sam took a step forward, and Little Snap Shot read his doom in the desperado's eyes.

All at once Blossom struck her horse savagely with one of her spurs, and a lunge carried the animal in front of the boy horse-trailer, where the girl instantly drew rein.

Thunder Sam greeted this sudden movement with an oath of rage. The horse was between the boy and his revolver!

"By heaven! of that's yer tactics, you'll hev to put up with the consequences. I'm worse than a thousand catamounts when I'm riled, an' riled I am jes' now! Uncover that boy!"

Blossom's look was the defiant response; she need not to have said:

"For you! Never!"

"The youngster's a coward, then."

"That's a lie!"

Out from behind the horse sprung Snap Shot, as the last word was uttered.

"I am here, Thunder Sam! May the best pistol win!"

The next instant the sharp report of a revolver awoke the morning echoes of the hills, for quicker than a flash the boy had covered and fired at his antagonist.

Thunder Sam reeled away; but did not drop his weapon.

"I'm hard hit; but what on that? I'm a thousand catamounts when I'm riled!"

Though struck and hurled back by the snapshot, the burly desperado recovered in a remarkably brief space of time.

He came forward with his battle-cry rising on the air:

"I'm a thousand catamounts when I'm riled!"

Little Snap Shot saw his danger; but flinched not.

Up went Thunder Sam's revolver, with a bronzed finger at the trigger.

The young horse-hunter fired again.

This time the man who struck the ground did not rise.

"You shot in time," said the girl, looking into Little Snap Shot's eyes. "I held my breath as he came toward you, for I could see where his finger was. Here end the life trails of Thunder Sam, a man without one redeeming trait."

"What's that, girl?"

The young couple looked toward the spot where the desperado had fallen.

They saw that he had spoken, for his lips still moved, and his eyes were fixed upon them.

Little Snap Shot instinctively laid his hand on the revolver he had just put up.

"Do it!" said Thunder Sam, following the movement with his eyes. "I'm a dangerous man while there's a spark ov life left. You should never leave a crippled rattlesnake until you've finished 'im, boy. Thet's my advice, an' I don't charge a cent for it, either."

Little Snap Shot did not draw the revolver.

"No," he said to the girl. "I can't kill a wounded man, though he is my bitterest foe."

"He deserves death."

"I know that; but it is not for me to take his life."

Thunder Sam heard these words, but he sent no looks of thankfulness toward the boy; on the contrary, he said:

"Do as you please, hoss-hunter. It's none ov yer bizness what I'd do ef I stood in yer boots."

Snap Shot did not reply.

"I will leave him where he is," he said in low tones to Blossom. "I am ready to quit this spot, are you?"

"I am eager to go, but whither?"

"Name our destination."

The old miner's protegee sent a swift glance down the trail toward Redeye.

"Why not back to camp?" queried the boy.

"No, no! not just now," was the response. "I dare not ask you to enter Redeye at this juncture. You want to recover your horse above all things?"

"Yes," eagerly.

"I thought so," smiled the girl. "We will follow this trail a piece. Mount and let me walk. I see that you have not recovered from the proof of Old Eclipse's jealousy."

Blossom slipped to the ground while she spoke, and the horse stood riderless beside the boy.

He would have declined the proffered saddle if the girl's glance had not told him that a declination would not have been listened to.

The excitement of the last few hours had kept him up, now he felt himself growing weak.

"I accept the saddle upon one condition," he said.

"Name it."

"It is that you will receive it back when I offer it."

Blossom smiled.

"Mount! I accept the proposition."

In another moment the young horse-hunter was firmly seated on horseback once more.

If he had glanced over his shoulder he would have seen a movement on the part of the man who had just fallen before the flash of his revolver.

"Thar go two fools—two infernal tenderfeet!" almost laughed Thunder Sam as his wild eyes followed the young couple moving away. "He'll never forget the day he had this pard at his mercy an' spared his life. I'll set up a cold deck on the hoss-trailer yet. Oh, I'm a thousand wild cats when I'm riled!"

Little Snap Shot and his fair companion had scarcely been hidden around a bend in the mountain trail when Thunder Sam, pistol in hand, once more crawled toward the cave lately occupied by the wounded Red Flash.

"Hyer I kin recuperate!" he ejaculated, when he found himself beyond the threshold. "Won't I keep my word yet? Won't I ride the white hoss inter Redeye, an' pay 'em all back fer the picnic they treated me to last night? Won't I come out on top arter all, jis' as I've always done afore? I've been shot worse ner this. I'm a thousand—"

He did not get to finish his favorite boast.

A wild cry like an Indian whoop startled him; he turned back to the opening and listened.

"The infernal red skunks ar' hyer!" he grated shrinking away. "I'm not quite so sure about ridin' that white hoss into Redeye now as I war a minute er two ago; but I've strength enough to treat the red varmints to a deadly surprise."

In the shadow of the cavern walls he crouched and waited.

Suddenly a number of horses were reined in in front of the opening, and a dozen painted warriors slid eagerly to the ground.

"The Apache braves have come back to Red Flash!" said the leader of the red-skins.

"Thet's a double-jointed lie! You red snakes hev come hyer to die!"

The opening at that moment seemed to swarm with Indians.

A human figure blocked their way, and the following instant Thunder Sam was emptying his revolver into their faces!

"Take what I'm givin' ye in payment of old grudges! Great Cæsar! I'd like ter people sperit-land with yer hull tribe."

The savages, taken by surprise, drew back for a moment, then, with terrible yells, they rushed forward and carried the cave by storm!

CHAPTER XVI.

CARRIED OFF.

REDEYE once more enjoyed quiet—that is, the Apaches remained away, and Spanish Jack did not return to repeat the performance which had added new foes to his list.

Blossom again occupied the cabin belonging to Old Eclipse, and several days had followed the scenes detailed in the foregoing chapter.

"She knows whar that young hoss-hunter is, but I'll not bother her to find out," said Old Eclipse more than once to himself. "I guess thar's no use in kickin' ag'in fate, but I feel like keepin' my oath in spite ov the girl. Snap Shot hezn't gone back to the old ranch, because he hezn't recovered the white hoss. He's huntin' the animile somewhar, an' I might as well hunt suthin' too."

Thereupon Old Eclipse threw a saddle on a horse on which he could depend, and galloped from Redeye as the sun was throwing his last beams upon the roofs of the shanties that constituted the camp.

Blossom saw him depart, and smiled as she watched him disappear.

"I don't care if they do meet now," she said to herself. "There was a time when Eclipse would have treated Snap Shot to a bullet on

sight—he did it once—but now a meetin' would not result thus. Let him but find his white horse and all my fears will end, for he will bid adieu to this wild country and go back to the old ranch."

A goodly distance from Redeye, Old Eclipse was giving his steed the spur, and with his rifle resting on the pommel of his saddle, was once more among the mountains, down whose trails he was riding swiftly.

He drew rein so suddenly that his steed was almost thrown back upon his haunches, and the old man shaded his eyes with his hand, for he was looking straight toward the red disk of the declining sun.

"I guess I've lost him, whoever he war," he said aloud, in no pleasant tones. "But never mind. Ef it war Thunder Sam, he'll turn up some day when I'm around, an' then I'll settle with him."

Thunder Sam? No! that worthy would no more cross Old Eclipse's path nor hunt the white horse again.

In the mountain cave which the Apaches took with a yell and a rush, Thunder Sam lay stiff at the end of his last trail.

The object which Old Eclipse had suddenly seen and so suddenly lost sight of was a man whom he hated with the same intensity that characterized his hatred of Thunder Sam.

If the old miner could have pierced certain hills and looked beyond, he would have seen this person, whose horse's head was turned toward Redeye.

The reader will recognize him when we say that he wore a huge sombrero and gold-laced jacket, and that his dark hair fell over a pair of shapely shoulders.

With his handsome yellowish face turned toward the setting sun, Spanish Jack allowed his horse to carry him toward the camp just abandoned by the old miner.

"This dash is for the mountain daisy," he said to himself. "I know where she is, and I'm going to possess her. After that the Mongolian mountains will not see Spanish Jack in a long time—perhaps nevermore. Not that I'm tired of a stampeder's life—no, no! but with a horse like this and a wife like Blossom, who wouldn't be willing to retire from the sport? *Carajo!* I'll break a thousand hearts with envy when I go back to Santa Fe!" and the Tiger of Arizona laughed at the prospect he deemed ahead.

A brisk gallop soon brought him to the outskirts of the camp.

The sun had disappeared and night once more held sway over the place where so many startling events had taken place within the last few days.

After his last desperate adventure in Redeye, Spanish Jack was deliberately re-entering the place, this time for a purpose on which he had set his heart.

Not content with the white horse, he wanted the one other beautiful prize the country contained—the late fair occupant of the Mountain Lodge.

With Blossom and White Rocket both, he could fill the New Mexicans with envy; he could afford to give up the life that had made him an Arizona Tiger.

Who knew but that Spanish Jack might not develop into a peaceful, if not an honored citizen of the far Southwest?

He was inclined to believe that the denizens of Redeye, who had been so fortunate as to escape his deadly revolvers on the occasion of his last visit there, were off on a hunt of some kind, for his keen eyes could not catch sight of a single figure as he passed the first cabins.

Still, he had prepared for a desperate emergency, for one of his hands gripped a cocked revolver while the other guided the white horse on.

Suddenly he stopped in front of a cabin, the door of which was shut.

"I'm at the queen's palace," he muttered, with a smile, and leaning toward the door he said in tones well-disguised, and not unlike Old Eclipse's:

"Hello in thar, Blossom. I'd like ter see ye fer a minute."

Almost instantly the door flew open, and the figure of the beauty of Redeye appeared on the threshold.

"Here I am. You are back—My God!"

Spanish Jack's hand shot toward the girl as she shrunk back with the startling exclamation on her lips.

"Fooled you, did I? *Carajo!* you're prettier than the stars. Not so fast, my daisy!"

The Tiger's arm was longer than Blossom thought it was, and ere she could utter a cry, or draw a weapon if she had one handy, the

bronzed hand clutched her arm, and she was lifted up by main strength.

"Not a word!" hissed Spanish Jack. "I only want a queen for the biggest and richest ranch on the Rio Grande, and who more fit to reign there than you? Speak not, if you love life, my beauty. Men don't lie when they call me Tiger Jack."

Blossom knew that resistance would avail her nothing, and she was lifted to the back of the horse which she instantly recognized.

"Now for Spanish Jack's kingdom! If it wasn't for certain reasons, Blossom, I'd rouse the natives as we leave Redeye."

He did not turn his horse's head; but kept straight on.

"Who do you think I saw at sundown in the mountains?" he said suddenly, addressing his captive.

The girl held her breath as she regarded him.

"It was Eclipse," continued the Arizonian Tiger. "The old feller must be off on a hunt of some kind. Ah! you were thinking I saw the young catamount who'd like to ride this horse again! I hear that he has recovered from the wound Eclipse gave him for fetching you back to Redeye."

Blossom started, and her look said plainly, "Who told you?"

"He'd better go home. He will remain here till he gets into trouble. *Caramba!* if I meet him, he'll not have a ranch to go back to."

How the girl's eyes flashed as the Tiger spoke these threatening words!

"Beware! if he encounters you, you may never stampede another herd!" she said.

Spanish Jack laughed derisively, and touched his horse with the spur, which sent the animal forward like an Indian shaft.

"It's farewell to Redeye, Queen Blossom," he laughed—"farewell to Old Eclipse and the horse-hunter also."

The girl did not reply.

Already the camp had disappeared, and they were ascending to the trails many feet above the level where it stood.

Was she to be queen on the ranch where Spanish Jack's word was law?

"Never!" she said when she had asked herself this question. "I may go to New Mexico, but the Tiger's victory shall never be complete."

Scarcely had Blossom finished when a stern command to halt rung down the mountain pass.

The Arizonian Tiger replied with a defiant laugh.

White Rocket seemed to leave the ground as the spurs were driven home.

"Die, then!" cried the man who had uttered the command.

There was an eager finger at the trigger of the repeating rifle aimed at the flying desperado.

But the weapon was suddenly dashed aside and Tiger Jack's foe wheeled upon the person who had interfered.

"You here? you mean young coyote? You've saved the devil's life—"

"And Blossom's too, thank Heaven!"

"No."

"My horse carried a double burden. You saw no one but Spanish Jack."

The speaker turned away and threw himself upon the back of a horse a few feet from the spot.

The next moment he was flying like the wind in the wake of Spanish Jack.

"If he saves Blossom I'll forgive 'im, hang me if I don't!" ejaculated the astonished man left behind.

It was Old Eclipse.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HORSE-HUNTER WINS.

"THAT was Old Eclipse," said Spanish Jack to his beautiful prisoner as the white horse carried them down the trail. "I did not expect to meet the old fellow here, but *carajo!* he's liable to turn up anywhere now. Why didn't he shoot? Ah! he might have seen you, Queen Blossom, and was afraid to trust his aim. Forward! White Rocket; you carry a rider braver and prettier than the boy who claims you!"

The steed kept on at a gait that seemed dangerous on that starlit trail, and mile after mile was left behind.

"Where's our hunter now?" exclaimed Spanish Jack as he let the horse crop the succulent grass of a plain that lay at the foot of the wooded slopes from among which he had just emerged.

Blossom did not reply.

Daylight had broken once more, and White

Rocket had carried his two riders far from the spot where Old Eclipse had attempted to check his speed.

There was triumph in the Tiger's dark eyes—triumph that gained in intensity whenever he regarded the beautiful girl whose waist was encircled by one of his strong arms.

Behind the pair was the mountain range, ahead a stretch of lovely country that lost itself against some dim mountains far away.

At once White Rocket raised his fox-like ears as though a sound had reached them.

"What do you hear, horse?" said Spanish Jack sweeping the landscape with his eye, and noting every object that crossed his vision.

Blossom, too, looked in every direction.

"Do you see yon moving speck?" suddenly asked the Tiger pointing toward the mountains they had left behind. "That is Old Eclipse. He has not given up the trail. *Santissima!* I knew he'd stick to it as long as possible. Go back, old man. I don't want your life." And the yellow stampeder waved his hand at the approaching object.

To Blossom's surprise Spanish Jack turned the white steed's head toward the advancing horseman.

"I am going to warn him that he must not trail Spanish Jack," said the Tiger, in response to his captive's inquisitive look. "He saved your life, I am told, therefore I don't want his; but he can follow me too far!"

Blossom watched the horseman with breathless interest.

He came forward at a rapid gait which each moment brought him into plainer view.

If the night had baffled him, he had struck the trail after all.

Spanish Jack never took his eyes from his pursuer. His fingers tightly clutched a revolver as he seemed to watch every movement of the horse that came eagerly on.

All at once Blossom uttered a cry which no will of hers could suppress.

The pursuer was not Old Eclipse, but Little Snap Shot!

At the same time Spanish Jack made a like discovery.

"*Carajo!* it is the boy!" he grated madly. "I shall not warn him, but he shall tumble from his horse when I get the drop on his head."

Not more than half a mile now separated the foes.

Little Snap Shot saw that he had been recognized, but that did not abate his speed.

"Now or never!" he said. "I recover Blossom and White Rocket to-day or never see the old ranch again! We part to-day forever, Spanish Jack! Arizona loses one or both of us where her grass grows longest." And Little Snap Shot sent up a thrilling battle-cry which told how eager he was to engage his enemy.

With teeth firm set and eyes burning with rage, Spanish Jack awaited the onset.

The arched neck of the horse-hunter's steed shielded his body from the stampeder's aim, and disconcerted him until a very few rods separated them.

"I have him now, Blossom!" suddenly exclaimed the Tiger. "Here ends the double trail of the herder boy!"

The eyes of the girl were as quick as Spanish Jack's aim.

The next moment there was a loud report, but the bullet intended for Snap Shot's head went whizzing toward the skies, Blossom's swift hand having turned the shot aside.

"Curse you, girl!" grated the stampeder. "Now more than ever you shall be queen of the ranch on the Rio Grande! I ride White Rocket; you forget that!"

And wheeling the white steed, he drove the crimson spurs deep into the bleeding flanks, and went over the grass like the wind.

The girl's eyes fairly blazed with triumph, as they regarded the man flying from the enemy pushing steadily in pursuit.

"Oh, feast your eyes on me if you want to, my Mongolian bird!" cried Spanish Jack, with a tiger's fierceness. "We are on the broad trail that ends by the waters of the Rio Grande. Who has the better horse? We are leaving the boy far behind."

Blossom glanced over her shoulder and saw, to her disappointment, that White Rocket was lengthening the distance between them and his young master.

The short rest had refreshed him.

Suddenly there came down the wind a shrill whistle.

White Rocket stopped instantly, straightened his creamy ears, and planted his forefeet firmly in the ground.

A curse in Spanish fell from the Tiger's lips.

He buried the spurs in the white steed's reeking sides. The animal winced, but did not move.

"He thinks to beat me thus, does he?" grated Spanish Jack, seeing that White Rocket was determined to obey Snap Shot's call. "Now shall he feel the vengeance of the Tiger of Arizona!"

Quick as a flash the bronzed stampeder wheeled upon his foe, who was approaching with a rush that seemed resistless.

Up went his revolver, but two hands caught his arm.

"You save him, girl? Never!" he roared.

He attempted to shake the fair shackles off, but in vain. Blossom clung like death to the arm that threatened the charging boy.

Spanish Jack ground his teeth and summoned all his rage and strength to aid him.

His left hand darted at the girl's throat; his fingers seemed to bury themselves beneath the fair skin, and with another mad oath he tore her loose.

"Now, my boy demon!" he growled. "I'll show you the vengeance of Spanish Jack."

That instant the eager boy came charging alongside.

Triumph and revenge lit up his eyes.

He stood erect in his stirrup with his revolver thrust forward.

"At last for Blossom and White Rocket!" pealed from his throat.

Spanish Jack's revolver met Snap Shot's half-way, but there was but one report.

As a human figure reeled from the flash the victor reined in his plunging steed, but the foamy horse did not come to a halt for a moment.

Little Snap Shot glanced backward.

"It was a long, wild trail, but I am at the end at last," he said, aloud as he turned his horse's head toward the distant mountains.

Well might the horse-hunter rejoice.

Two figures lay on the grass where White Rocket stood, but only one was dead.

Spanish Jack's sombrero lay beside his bullet-bored face, and the sunlight gleamed among the embroidery of his handsome jacket.

Now would the ranches of the Southwest have rest, and the men of Redeye would look for the Tiger no more.

Little Snap Shot sent up a shout of victory as his hand closed on the bridle of the best horse in Arizona.

The long hunt had ended at last, and White Rocket was his once more.

Blossom soon recovered from the terrible choking administered by Spanish Jack, and smiled admiringly as the boy helped her upon the white steed's back.

"Now for the old man back among the mountains!" ejaculated Snap Shot.

This time the old miner's *protegee* did not remonstrate; she did not fear the reception the youth would meet with at Old Eclipse's hands.

"I war a jealous old fool!" said a certain individual a few hours later, while he held Snap Shot's hand between his tawny palms. "I might hav known that Blossom war bound to find a younger pard than Old Eclipse. When I shot you in Redeye an' saw that you war goin' to git over it, I said the jig war up, an' so it war. The girl is yours, boy, ef you think she's worth tyin' to. Drat my pictur, ef I wouldn't hunt a hoss like you hav, old as I am, to find a prize like Blossom whar I found the critter."

A blush stole over Blossom's face, and with a glance at Little Snap Shot, she smilingly averted her eyes.

The trio went back to Redeye, and from thence, after a few days, pushed southward.

The long journ'y ended—need we say it?—on a beautiful and well-stocked ranch in Southern Arizona, where White Rocket gave vent to his joy in many a whinny when he found himself in the old pastures again.

Red Flash would steal him no more, for the bones of the great Apache chief lay on the mountain trail where death struck him from the white horse's back.

Vows are not always kept.

Thunder Sam did not get to ride White Rocket into Redeye, nor did Spanish Jack win, as he swore he would, the beauty of the Mountain Lodge.

Little Snap Shot kept his oath in the main, for he recovered the snowy steed which to him was now worth his weight in gold, for at the end of his trail he found the fairest and bravest bride in the Southwest, or, as Old Eclipse is still wont to say, "The Jim dandiest little gal in Arizona!"

THE END.

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